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HOW A BLACK MAN WON THE
PRESIDENCY IN 2008:
THE SHIFTING MEANING OF RACE IN
THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF THE USA

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Abstract

The US presidential election of 2008 was considered a milestone for blacks and race in the USA. However, despite the considerable attention given to the election, it has not been placed in historical and political context. In particular, contemporary assumptions about the importance of the symbolism of a black president and about how the election tested the racial outlook of whites pervade the literature. Prior vigorously contested ideas such as equality, discrimination and integration were largely unconsidered during the election and with the Obama victory. This research attempts to bring out why race, considered predominantly through representation and identity, raised considerable energies among the electorate, examining the themes of “hope” and “change”, and the online campaign. To establish exactly what the election was reacting to, the thesis attempts a historical reconstruction of race: first, by working through a critique of realignment theory as the predominant academic view of electoral processes, then through an examination of how whiteness figured as a means to resolve class and related conflicts from the late-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, and finally examining how whiteness was consolidated through post-war suburbanisation. This reconstruction moves past the idea of race as psychological phenomenon or as a legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. The thesis then analyses the turnaround on race and why race was posed without reference to equality in 2008 through looking at both the idea of white racial bases and of identity politics. We conclude that the meaning of race in its post-war sense is largely absent in the contemporary USA suggesting that a politics of suburban interests better explains post-civil rights developments than race. We show how the politics of identity, so evident in the election, has been unable to raise issues of equality to address the enormous racial divisions in the USA today.

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Introduction

The 2008 US presidential election was seen by many as historic in marking the distance that the USA had moved from its previous racial politics. For the veteran Civil Rights commentator, Manning Marable, to elevate a black American as its chief executive was a stunning reversal of history.”¹ In examining this election, the aim of the thesis overall is to understand how this had come about. The main question this thesis sets out to answer is “what role was played by race in the 2008 US presidential election?”.

For some authors Obama’s victory seemed to speak for itself: if the nation as a whole could support black leadership then this alone was sufficient to show there was a substantial change to previous racial politics.² Others stressed that Obama had to gather a huge number of white votes for victory. This led to several commentaries that came with the Obama victory which argued that the USA had moved beyond race, i.e. had become “post-racial”. In this argument, the question being asked in the election was not whether voters supported Obama or McCain for president, but rather were white people ready to accept a black man as political leader: were whites able to cast aside their backward prejudices? Some stressed that Obama, despite his victory, had not received the majority of white votes and that this demonstrated the continuing divisions based on race. Of white voters, 55 per cent cast their ballot for McCain (almost 60 per cent of white men and 53 per cent of white women). However, the more nuanced reading was that Obama was not alone in Democrat candidates failing to gain a majority of white votes. Since 1968

¹ Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, (London: Verso, 2009, 2nd ed.), 297

² The assumption that Obama’s election was, in itself, momentous seemed to be shared with the Nobel Prize Committee who precipitously gave Obama the Nobel Peace prize in November 2009 – the nominations closed just 11 days after Obama took office.

Republicans have won the majority of the white vote. Of the last ten presidential cycles Obama had been more successful than any of the white Democratic candidates – other than Bill Clinton. Clinton, like Obama, gained 43 per cent of the white vote.³

Many took it that race had been so important in the USA that, in its symbolism, the vote for Obama in effect acted as a plebiscite on racial attitudes and that other factors could be ignored. However, the reasons for voting for a candidate are by no means exhausted in an analysis of the racial composition of the vote. Indeed in Chapter 8 this thesis develops the argument that voting choice might be better understood in relation to politics connected to the locations where voters live rather than voters' racial background and views. In exit polls "Only 9 per cent said that race was an important factor in making their voting decision (and of these voters, 53 percent supported Obama!)"⁴ Even if voters were "shy" about saying their vote was made because of their views on race, the numbers of votes does not explain what meaning race had come to have.

Ultimately the thesis aimed to see the shifting meaning of race in the political culture of the USA and connected with change in US history rather than attempt to divine meaning from the changing voting patterns as seen, for example, in the 2008 election. A historical-political analysis allows us to do three things which cannot be done through adding up the decisions of voters and ascribing a racial approach – or

³ The last Democrat candidate to do better than Obama was Carter with 47 per cent of the white vote in 1976. See Dianne M. Pinderhughes, "Race, the Presidency, and Obama's First year" in Charles P. Henry, Robert L. Allen and Robert Chrisman (eds.) *The Obama Phenomenon: Toward a Multiracial Democracy* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 98. Rickey Hill, "The Race Problematic, The Narrative of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Election of Barack Obama" in Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke (eds.), *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America's New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 145

⁴ John Kenneth White "" in "A Transforming Election: How Barack Obama Changed American Politics", in Crotty, William J. ed. *Winning the Presidency 2008*. (Boulder, Co., Paradigm, 2009), 191

otherwise – to these decisions. First, it enables us to establish origins, i.e. where the ideas behind race and the impetus to establish or to dismantle racial ways of thinking comes from. Second it enables an understanding of change. It is not clear why people might change their views on race based on internal motivations or that somehow these changes are shared, i.e. are made en masse. Rather than assume mass change in racial outlook as a given we can attempt to connect with changed circumstances and political approaches over time i.e. we can engage with the political and historical factors and the contestation that brings change about. Third, we can also point enquiries as to what race meant in given circumstances. Rather than consider the understanding of race as fixed we can look at how the meaning connected with the concept of race changes.

Obamamania

The starting point for our historical-political engagement is to examine the politics and the discussion in the 2008 election itself. This is done in the first three chapters, in the first part “Examining the 2008 Election”. By analysing the campaign and the arguments put forward there, we can see the particular ways in which race was discussed and understood. In the initial chapters there is an examination of the election overall, an attempt to explain the themes of “hope” and “change”, and an analysis of the online campaign which seemed to be the location of much of the dynamism that the election exhibited. Here the thesis looks specifically at the election for clues as to how a black man became president and what this said about the changing meaning of race in US political culture in a society where blacks have little political power and where a myriad of social statistics showed blacks all too often positioned as second-class citizens.

In particular, in this thesis we want to understand how race had changed such that Obama's racial background brought with it not just some hostility but also a great deal of support. A secondary question to address is "how do we account for the enthusiasm that came with the Obama campaign?". The election produced excitement and enthusiasm beyond that of the elections of recent years, both during the campaign and with the Obama victory. This was often described as "Obamania" which captured the exuberance often exhibited. As one academic noted of his New York neighbours, "I can name many of my well-to-do white friends who took to the highways and byways to campaign for Obama in the strong conviction that he would present a public face for the United States that would allow us to regain the affection and respect of people all around the globe."⁵ The enthusiasm in the campaign seemed directly linked to the candidate's race. The sense from the campaign was that much of the enthusiasm was a consequence of a white polity which was hostile to racial politics and was excited at being able to distance itself from those politics – even if this was expressed on occasion in chants by Obama supporters that "race doesn't matter!"

Despite the celebratory declarations about race that came with Obama's victory the actual discussion of race during the election had been muted and limited in key ways. Both the Democrats and the Republicans had little to say explicitly on the subject of race. There were secondary discussions that related to the person of the candidate. For example there was the discussion about how black Obama was. There was also the discussion about the symbolism of a black candidate being elected president. However, given the racial divisions in the USA, there was no

⁵ Richard A. Epstein, "The Good News on Race Relations", *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 157, No. 210, 2009, 216

substantive discussion in the election about what might be done about these divisions. Indeed on occasion Obama expressed the view that race had acted as a “diversion” from the problems facing the nation. Despite the limited discussion both Democrats and Republicans were closely scrutinised for anything they said about race.⁶ From the Republican perspective there was sensitivity towards raising the race of the candidate or appearing to “play the race card” in any way which followed at least in part from its mea culpa on racial campaigning in 2005.⁷

Post-racial

A key idea that the thesis engages with and that emerged in the election campaign is the idea of “post-racial”. This term is relatively new and in some ways is confusing. A common way of understanding the claim that with Obama’s victory that the USA was post-racial was that there was no longer any discrimination. For example the Oxford Dictionary of English⁸ defines post-racial as “Denoting or relating to a period or society in which racial prejudice and discrimination no longer exist”.⁹ However, studied in context, post-racial was seldom if ever used to make the strong claim that there was no longer racial prejudice or discrimination in the USA. As the thesis discusses in Chapter 1, the post in post-racial was not used in the sense of post as in post-war i.e. simply as following, as after. The argument was not being made that

⁶ James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, Jr., *Epic Journey: The 2008 Elections and American Politics* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 28

⁷ Head of the Republican National Committee Ken Mehlman, in a 2005 NAACP speech said “Some Republicans gave up on winning the African-American vote, looking the other way or trying to benefit politically from racial polarization. I am here today as the Republican chairman to tell you we were wrong” cited in Anne E. Kornblut, “Bush and Party Chief Court Black Voters at 2 Forums”, *New York Times*, 15 July 2005, accessed 14 April 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/15/politics/15bush.html>

⁸ The Oxford Dictionary of English differs most significantly from its cousin the Oxford English Dictionary in that it attempts to bring new words more quickly into the dictionary.

⁹ Oxford Dictionary of English, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/post-racial> accessed 1 August 2016

racism no longer existed. Rather the post in post-racial was used in the sense of post as in post-modern. Post-modern should be understood, paraphrasing Lyotard the French philosopher, as an “incredulity towards [the] meta-narratives”¹⁰ that came with modernity. Or in other words a rejection of “big ideas” or major theories that attempted to explain society as a whole. So, in the same spirit, post-racial describes an incredulity towards the particular meta-narrative or overarching explanation that race provides. There was a questioning of whether the category was any longer a credible basis upon which to conduct public life. Racism might well still exist among individuals, for example, but it was no longer a basis for public policy or a major factor in political motivation. In other words, race had no purchase in a political sense. This meant that matters concerning race might be reintegrated into US life as behaviours requiring regulation or else as aspects of other problems such as poverty or law and order, rather than as previously the pursuit of different policies directed by the conflicting interests of different groups.

Post-racial as understood here becomes a double-edged sword. The idea of using race becomes less important as a means to engage with the world both in appealing to those who are racially prejudiced but also as a motivation in opposing and overcoming racial inequality and divisions as a matter of public policy. Consequently the idea is that there has been a diffusing of race as a powerful political issue. There is little sense of race as a motivator for those who want to oppress, but also no aspect of race as a call to arms for those arguing for equality. The implication is that

¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard cited in Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989)

in a post-racial society, race no longer matters – as one author has it “[t]he postracial is the political horizon of racism’s depoliticization”.¹¹

The double edged character of post-racial can be seen in the candidacy of Obama, Obama was considered a post-racial candidate in that he made little play of racial divisions. There were to be no policy implications as a result of the different life-chances afforded to blacks as against whites. Obama gained significant support on race not through his attempts to overcome the racial divide – there were no such attempts. Rather where Obama received support on the basis of race this should be understood as because of his function of a signifier that the USA had moved past these divisions in being able to elect a black man as president.

Hope and change

The thesis develops its engagement with the idea of post-racial through drawing out its connection with the idea of hope. Hope was one of the main ways in which the enthusiasm for Obama was expressed. Obama’s presentation of hope can be understood as an attempt to redefine the American Dream. It took the struggles of individuals and groups to improve their circumstances, such as the struggle against slavery, and re-presented these as part of the American story and ultimately as fulfilling the American Dream. As we discuss in Chapter 1 and 2, in the re-telling of hope the qualities of these individuals and groups were remade into the qualities of the nation’s political system that they had to struggle against.¹² In laying claim to

¹¹ Babnor Hesse, “Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: The Postracial Horizon”. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*. 110: 1. Winter 2011, 157

¹² James T. Petre, makes a similar point: what is new is that Obama “interprets ‘America’s true genius; as a capacity for reform”. “Barack Obama’s American Exceptionalism”, James T Petre, “Hermeneutical Rhetoric and Progressive Change: Barack Obama’s American Exceptionalism” in Harris, Heather E., Kimberly R. Moffitt, and Catherine R. Sims, eds. *The Obama Effect: Multidisciplinary Renderings of the 2008 Campaign*, (New York: Suny Press, 2010), 23

these individual stories, the re-telling of hope also changed the emphasis, from there being the American Dream to there being many American Dreams. Obama's main exposition on hope made his own life story one of many narratives. His life story of being black and yet in contention for the presidency becomes one American Dream among many. Obama's hope sought to diffuse or deconstruct the meta-narrative or grand theory of the American Dream into many narratives, many American Dreams. In this new version, race might be seen merely as part of the weave made by so many individual stories.

In attempting to explain the enthusiasm for and the popularity of Obama's campaign, the thesis also examines two other themes. The first is that of "change" which, alongside hope, seemed to capture the enthusiasm of the election. The second is the online campaign which itself was at times credited as being a source of the enthusiasm on display and at the least was able to give outlet to the energies of large numbers of ordinary people.

In examining "change" we look at what several commentators have called a content-less slogan. For many Americans, it may be that change simply became a way in which Obama might be contrasted to the unpopular Bush presidency. However, the meaning of change as a political intervention took shape and became clear in the course of its application in the campaigns both for the Democratic nomination and in the general election. In the context of the election discussions and debates it becomes clear – as we discuss in Chapter 2 – that the idea is being applied in a pointed way and speaks to a cynicism about contemporary US political life. In using the idea that Obama represented "change we can believe in", there was the signalling that Obama's campaign should be contrasted with others who were

compromised by their connection with the corruption of Washington politics. Obama's inexperience in this telling was an asset.

In using "change" what at first examination seems to be a call for a positive outlook (backed by its connection to hope) in its application in the campaign debates strongly signals a negative outlook, i.e. the disbelief that others might represent change that the electorate might believe in. Connected with the idea of change was the success of the online campaign. Through the raising of billions of dollars in campaign support from ordinary people and the engagement of millions in campaigning, the online campaign acted to distance the Obama campaign from Washington insiders and from money provided by lobbyists or super-rich donors. The activities of millions in the online campaign stood in contrast to the corrupt big money politics of the Washington elite. This itself was an argument that Obama represented a rejection of previous Washington-centred politics.

Race disconnected from equality

A vital point about the discussion of race that came with the election – which is partly linked to the idea of post-racial – needs to be raised here. This is the way in which race as discussed during the election was shorn of its connection with equality. In the discussion race was linked with the symbolism of Obama's skin colour. However, any discussion of race in connection with the idea of equality was notable by its absence.

The following table summarises how race was discussed in the Obama election:

<i>Considered central</i>	<i>Seldom if at all considered</i>
Symbolism	Legal equality
Representation	Material inequality
Consciousness (of whites and blacks)	Political divisions
Identity	Social and economic structures

When race was discussed in the 2008 election the factors shown in the left hand column continuously featured. However, ideas previously strongly connected with race – shown in the right hand column – were seldom raised. Race in 2008 was considered through the racial identity of voters, the symbolism of voting for a black man, and in the importance given to one’s political representative having a particular racial background. While these have been longstanding themes in the discussion of race, it is notable that other, previously central, ways of seeing race were largely absent. Previously, at least as much weight had been given to equality when discussing race. Several ideas were not substantially taken up: the idea of equality before the law, the material difficulties facing blacks, and the political divisions where it might be seen that problems facing blacks or that were experienced in the inner cities were left unaddressed.

The way race was presented in the 2008 election itself needs to be interrogated. Race in 2008 has come to be seen in particular ways and understood through particular ideas that point to an altered content and meaning from the campaigning of the Civil Rights movement. Race is not a monolithic idea. This becomes apparent

in the major change of emphasis in how race was considered in 2008 compared to the past.

The coverage of race in this way was not challenged in the discussion during the election. Obama did reference this point by arguing that race in the past had been a distraction and that the problems facing blacks should be seen, rather, as part of the problems of poverty, resources etc. faced more generally. However, because this view was not substantially questioned or debated, in effect this meaning of race became the one assumed. One of the questions the thesis needs to answer to understand race in the election was “why was race largely discussed without reference to equality in 2008?”.

We return to this point later in the introduction in a discussion on identity politics.

Moving beyond the election

As an important result of a close examination of the election, it becomes apparent that neither the discussions nor the events of the election are an adequate resource for explaining why race was understood in the way that it was. Both the media discussion and the online debates, for example, show limited reflection about race. The politics of the election campaign – and the post-racial discussion afterwards – did not so much deal with race but anticipate or respond to changes in racial viewpoints among whites considered to have been established independently of politics. The question raised in the limited “horse race” media coverage of the election was how much had white views on race changed and had those views changed sufficiently for a black man to win. Demographic factors, generational differences and supposedly changed cultural values – where the electorate had

become for some reason more “liberal” on race – stood in for any attempt to understand political change.

As originally conceived, the thesis was to steadfastly retain a focus on the 2008 election itself. When I first came to research the role race played in 2008 my consideration was that through closely examining the 2008 election I would be able to draw out how race factored into political considerations and was a motivation both for Obama’s supporters and opponents. Coming from a media studies background I undertook to examine, for example, the media discussion and the online aspects of the campaign and show how race surfaced both explicitly and implicitly in the discussions around the election.

However, increasingly it became evident that to develop an explanation of how Obama won and what that meant required a broader investigation of how race factored into US politics and meant working outside the confines of the election. There was a need to move beyond the election and examine history over a longer period in an attempt to explain both why race had been so important in the USA, what had evidently changed to make the rejection of race so important for so many, and why race was understood predominantly as a matter of a president with a darker skin tone rather than through the significant material and political divisions between blacks and others. The attempt to address the broader questions of race through a historical/political reconstruction of race in its main twentieth century manifestation is done in the second part of the thesis, “Understanding Race Historically”, in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

To restate the difficulty the thesis has to navigate in a slightly different way, we wanted to challenge the assumptions made about race in the 2008 election. To do

this, however, necessarily entailed the challenge of capturing the historically specific logic with which the race question is posed and posed again, but differently, at successive moments in American development. Despite the limited timeframe of the conjuncture of the election only the extended timeframe allowed for a logical reconstruction of the historical paradigm required for a solid questioning of these assumptions.

Political theory

In beginning to address broader questions about race and US political culture, the investigation looked to political analysis and US political theory. In doing this, however, what came to light was that the limited contact with race found in the discussions of the 2008 election was also a feature of mainstream US political analysis. In critical realignment, the default interpretation of elections in political theory, there is only a tenuous connection between race and the political developments expressed in US elections. In Chapter 4, "Theories of Electoral Change", the thesis examines how political science, at least in its main approach, has not significantly integrated a discussion of race into change over time. The dominant approach towards elections based around partisan/critical realignment has by and large assumed racial outlooks as one aspect of political identification or as connected with other issues that motivated voters, such as crime or welfare. Race in these readings is generally seen as external to electoral and political processes.

It seemed that the main way in which race was understood in political theory, i.e. through psychology, was to largely render it logically prior to political events and consequently an understanding of the dynamics of race lay outside the remit of political investigation. Race was seen as a consequence of group prejudices and/or

as a legacy of particular periods of history – of the racial organising of slavery or of Jim Crow. While from this standpoint politics might interact with and connect with race, for example through appeals to latent white racism perhaps, race in this model was not *of* politics. In Chapter 4 the thesis examines the idea of electoral realignment as something of a case study of the limits of US political theory in how it deals with race and as something of a more general critique of the way in which there is the assumption of static categories, i.e. ideas such as race are not seen as changing over time.

Historical Reconstruction of Race

The problem with most of the discussion of race in relation to the 2008 election is that it was based on unquestioned racial assumptions – on the constant background of white racism since the Civil War – rather than seeing racial prejudice as nuanced, changing idea that had more or less force in US politics according various historical and political factors. The thesis must, therefore, embark upon a reconsideration of the meaning of race in United States politics and history. Altogether a more ambitious undertaking was required than that originally envisaged: a historical investigation of the complex relationship that the USA has had with race and subsequently how this finds political expression. To answer the original enquiry required consulting historical sources across a much greater span of time and subsequently the dissertation moved in a different direction from that originally envisioned.

Our approach was to ascertain the reasons why racial thinking as it appeared in the twentieth century was developed and then to explore how this form of race declined. For the bulk of the twentieth century, race was a powerful force in US politics.

However, in recent years this force had changed significantly. Race in its main twentieth century form i.e. the denial of equality has become less important. However, at the same time vestiges of race as previously understood, matters of identity, significantly increased in importance. With the 2008 Obama victory the discussion was that race no longer acted as a barrier to achievement by blacks and racism was almost universally decried in public life. It seems appropriate to describe this situation as a “turnaround” on race. If we could establish the reason that race was important this might also lead in to establishing why and how race changed. To understand the role that race played in 2008 then also required answering the related question of “how did racial factors and racial thinking change during the twentieth century?”

It seemed to us that an explanation of race that applied for most of the twentieth century would require certain characteristics. First, it would have to account for the strength of feeling involved over an extended period of time. Second, it would have to explain how race became important not simply in the South, but also on a national basis. Third, our model would have to connect with the way in which race took on a universal character. It would have to explain how whiteness became connected with being American. Fourth, it would have to account for the form that race took in the physical separation of whites and blacks that, again, applied on a national basis. Finally, it would have to make some account for why race in this twentieth century manifestation would, at the least, lose momentum as the century progressed.

In our historical construction of race we attempt to identify the particular ways in which race functions in the USA. Rather than attempt a reconstruction based on theories of race we attempt to link to particular twists and turns of how race featured in political development. There are a host of theories of race, of attempts to define

race and its development in general. However, by instead presenting a historically oriented investigation we can see the interactions of race with other political factors such as class and nationality, and vitally the changes in the idea of what race means as it plays out in its specific historical context within the United States. Rather than, for example, place the idea of race in inverted commas and show how it falsely describes reality, the thesis considers the way that ideas and meaning – and practices – change over time in a way that abstract theories fail to capture.

In developing our historical model of race in the USA, the thesis also engaged in a critique of other historical approaches. The contention in this thesis is that the limited main ways in which historical explanations have been applied are problematic and do not amount to convincing historical explanations. These explanations often leave important gaps which are filled by explanations based on the consciousness of the population. Where historical explanations are inadequate, automatically the fall-back explanation for race applies: that whites are racist i.e. racism becomes the (inadequate and circular) explanation for racial politics.

Perhaps the most pervasive way that race is linked to history is through the legacy of slavery. In a simple sense the poverty and degradation that was the consequence of slavery has a demeaning legacy on the black population. Even with the end of slavery there was poverty, ignorance and at least in parts a destructive cultural legacy. While slavery was in place there was also undoubtedly a demoralising effect on the black population not directly under its sway. Nor are there a great number of generations separating the population of 2008 from the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Even with the abolition of slavery the view that blacks were fitted to this role did not vanish overnight. The ignominious end to Radical Reconstruction was also understood in such a way that it was used to bring into question the abilities of

blacks to be able to govern (although by the 1960s revisionist historians had to a large degree undermined this standpoint).¹³

Nonetheless, race as a legacy of slavery does not amount to a substantial historical explanation for race over time. Essentially, as a legacy, the impact of slavery on ideas of race is passive. A legacy is unable to account for new developments. Additionally slavery was a form of social organisation, what might be better termed a mode of accumulation within capitalism in the USA, only of Southern states and consequently, is limited in what it tells us about the situation nationally. So, for example, one important way that race functioned in the USA in the twentieth century was through the spatial division of the population where whites moved out of the cities to all-white suburbs whereas blacks became concentrated in poor inner-city areas.¹⁴ The legacy of slavery has little to tell us about why this started to happen from the 1890s and about how this developed on a national basis. Nor can the legacy of slavery tell us anything about how this process began to reverse from the 1970s (as is discussed in Chapter 8). The point here is that the novelty and renewed dynamic of race as the twentieth century developed cannot be accounted for by an institution that has ended. Indeed, while slavery was organised around a close division of labour between blacks and whites, race in its main twentieth century manifestation was marked by the way in which blacks were excluded from access to the new dynamic suburban labour markets.

In a similar way to slavery, race in the twentieth century has been linked to Jim Crow and the legacy of Jim Crow. A related difficulty in understanding the historical

¹³ The work that began the reassessment was W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*. Vol. 6. Oxford University Press, 1935.

<https://archive.org/details/blackreconstruc00dubo>

¹⁴ See chapter 6, pp202-216

development of race through Jim Crow is that it is a Southern institution. It is unclear how “peculiar” southern institutions might be said to have a national impact on race. Rather than similarities, the differences between race on a national basis and race as applied in Jim Crow are what are notable. While the segregation in Jim Crow was enforced by law and reached directly into all areas of public life, the racial segregation of suburbia was not legally mandated. Rather, the boundaries of white suburbia were policed by residents voting with their feet or employing informal tactics to stop property sales across the colour line. Understanding the national divisions of race through Jim Crow is not possible. Further, as we argue later in the thesis in Chapter 6, the successes of the Civil Rights movement in the South and the continued emphasis on these successes acted to divert attention from the informal racial politics of the rest of the USA. Notably it was opposition to moves to end housing and educational segregation in the North in the late 1960s and early 1970s that was one of the most significant factors in putting paid to the civil rights movement.

A third way in which there has been an attempt to link race to political developments is in the post-civil rights era has been described as the “Southern Strategy” (this is used as a case study on racial appeals in Chapter 8). In this view the Republicans apply a Southern model of appeals to racism as a view held by white bases of support outside the South. This has been perhaps the major explanation of the application of racial politics since the civil rights era. From this standpoint the Republicans appealed to the racial prejudices of Northern whites in an attempt to undermine the New Deal coalition in a continuation of the way that they had appealed to Southern whites. This understanding relies on the supposition that there

is latent racism among Northern whites.¹⁵ It does not explain this racism but rather assumes that it is present. Further it interprets the New Deal as an attempt to overcome racial divisions where rather the New Deal was one of the main mechanisms to establish the physical divisions between blacks and whites in its federal backing for whites-only suburbia.¹⁶

As we discuss in Chapter 7, rather than there being the use of Southern racial organising techniques in the North it might be argued that in some ways the flow of racial organising has gone the other way. The development of racially segregated Southern suburbs has followed the Northern model. The least segregated areas remain in the South, but the pattern has been to apply what were in the main Northern practices more systematically to areas in the South.

The last historical model the thesis engages with is the idea of whiteness. This is covered in some detail in Chapter 9. Especially in its historical investigations, the thesis has employs the methodology of whiteness i.e. that race is formed by exclusion and inclusion in relation to the major group rather than by an unchanging negative attitude towards skin-colour or any other specific attribute. However, we take issue with the use of whiteness as used in much of contemporary whiteness studies literature which treats whiteness as an ahistoric structure of “white privilege”.

¹⁵ Myrdal describes private Northern prejudices thus: “The social paradox in the North is exactly this, that almost everybody is against discrimination in general but, at the same time, almost everybody practices discrimination in his own personal affairs. It is the cumulation of all these personal discriminations which creates the color bar in the North and for the Negro causes unusually severe unemployment, crowded housing conditions, crime and vice.” *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1944), 1010.

¹⁶ See chapter 5, “The New Deal and Race” and Chapter 6 “The Suburban (White) Melting Pot” Also James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, (New York: New Press, 2005), 130., *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 130.

At this stage it is worth asserting that the idea of whiteness amounts to the assumption that there are a series of flexible institutions which proffer advantages for whites as against blacks. In works on whiteness in recent years these have been understood as informal networks of privilege where whites gain simply by wont of being white. There is the outward appearance of formal equality. However, behind this façade is a series of preferences made in favour of whites. The limitations of this model are that whiteness seems to stand on its own. Essentially through their lived racial identity, which seems to be largely unchanging over time, whites are supposedly able to draw advantage from the racial setup. As such this is a description of white racism that floats above historical developments. This is, we will contend, only the appearance of a historical approach.

This model has it that there is a system of whiteness which in some readings has been in place for several hundred years. We note here that despite the idea of an undifferentiated whiteness the supposed benefits of being white seem to be unevenly shared in practice, for example over the last 40 years or so. We also note that the idea that there has been a hostility in many quarters towards ideas of whiteness as part of the “culture wars” in recent years but in this reading this does not seem to have affected whiteness. Chapter 9 attempts to link whiteness with the politics of identity as a way of understanding how whiteness has significantly changed over time and the meaning of the contemporary hostility to whiteness.

Outlining our historical political model of race

Our thesis begins an attempt at explaining the default racial organisation of the twentieth century through looking the physical separation of the races throughout the USA that in large part was enacted through deliberate mass whites-only

suburbanisation. As discussed in Chapter 6, the systematic spatial division of the USA into areas that were white only and the ghettoization of large parts of the inner cities where only black residents lived was only widely recognised in the 1980s and the 1990s with the idea that an “American Apartheid” had been created and the interrogation of how the suburban expansion operated along racial lines.¹⁷

Through our model we want to explain why the systematic separation of blacks and whites happened. The federal backing for whites-only suburbanisation in the New Deal and the decades after the Second World War that underwrote these divisions, it seems to us, was not just a result of racially based federal policy. Rather, until the late 1960s, this approach had been largely uncontested and so support, it should be assumed, was much wider than the predilections of the federal bureaucracy. There was little in the literature to explain this. Without an alternative explanation we are left, by default, with the racial outlooks of whites as an explanation in itself.

In working back through history to try to explain how this division gained support, our research leads us to examine the waves of race-based campaigning that washed over the USA from the 1870s through to the 1940s. The thesis, starting in Chapter five, “Negotiating Whiteness”, attempts to set out how a politics emerged that accepted, indeed expected or demanded, the separation of blacks and whites and could do so with little contestation. This racial politics, we argue, became the way in which the USA sought to deal with the divisions based around class, ethnicity, nationalism and religion that there were between different groups of whites. We attempt to show how, in particular, the conflicts connected with assimilating large

¹⁷ Two key works include: Douglas S. Massey, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

numbers of European migrants and blunting the potential conflicts of class came to be handled through the prism of race.

The thesis relies on several superb examinations of the past as a guide. For example, the thesis uses material from working class history that attempts to understand the travails of the early trade union movement in the West, scholarship on the nativist movement that outlines the roiling patterns of reaction from the 1880s into the 1920s, and whiteness studies that seeks to explain important ways in which waves of immigrants bought into or were sold a white outlook. Chapter five, "Negotiating whiteness" attempts to bring these developments together. By bringing together movements and events from the turbulent period from the 1870s until the 1940s, the thesis shows how the negotiations of class and of nationality in large part took on a racial form and ultimately influenced the development of white bases of support. This is a complex picture made of several strands but bringing these strands together shows how racial thinking and organisation went to the heart of political change even though this took several forms and had varying degrees of intensity. There are seemingly contradictory factors at work here that make this by no means a straightforward story. Thus, for example, although there is a New Deal coalition that includes blacks and provides material support to blacks, there is at the same time the establishment of whites only towns and suburbs through New Deal support and sometimes directly as New Deal policy.¹⁸ The divide between blacks and whites is hardened in this period, but the impetus is far from simply being white hostility to blacks. Indeed rather than a settled whiteness in opposition to blackness, this period contains part of a long movement towards the creation of a combined white outlook.

¹⁸ Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 130

The early part of this period is instructive. This is partly because it took on a relatively clear form through the campaigning efforts of nativists and partly in how this period came to a conclusion points to how problems were to be negotiated. For the early part of this period from about the 1880s to the 1920s the racial campaigning often took the form of the idea of nativism. Nativism was a reaction to the waves of large-scale immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe that began in the 1880s and accelerated in the 1890s. Nativism acted as a constant reaction to an alien presence in the body politic. The conflict was centred on the divisions between large numbers of white immigrants who had arrived to fill the needs of burgeoning industry and the existing white native population. These newcomers – what John Higham called “Strangers in the Land”¹⁹ – were more likely to be unskilled labourers than the existing “native” workers, had different national origins from those of the existing population (and a much more recent connection to the extent that this might signal divided loyalties), were Catholic rather than Protestant, and, because they did not have a stake in existing property relations, might well be attracted to anarchist or socialist politics that sought to redistribute wealth.

As we discuss in Chapter 5, the constant agitation of nativism was finally undermined and came to an end with the immigration legislation of 1924 which set quotas for immigration. The new immigration law, while still favouring Protestant immigrants from Northern Europe, set out clear lines linking citizenship to race. In essence 1924 legislation set out immigration controls which had it that whites of all ethnicities might become citizens, but barred those from non-white countries from applying to become American. It should be noted that there were small exceptions.

¹⁹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York, Athenium, 1974)

For example for blacks the 1870 Naturalization Act had set out the special status of “aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent”²⁰ for naturalisation. The Republican dominated congress of the time did this to underpin the status of blacks as “a matter of justice” which had only just been won at such cost.²¹ However, with the 1924 act the annual quota for those from all African countries totalled 1,200 – this might be compared, for example, to the number from Germany which was 51,000 or from the UK which was 34,000. Overall 2.3 per cent of the total immigration quota was for countries outside of Europe.²² The legislation acted to signal that all whites should be considered in common as against non-whites although with an implicit ranking among whites in that the quotas involved favoured the home countries of the native population. In essence the new law linked the question of being American directly to the question of being white.

The setting up of immigration laws establishing the difference between whites and others was a key starting point to overcoming the divisions among whites. Subsequently the waves of nativism that had been seen since the 1890s came to an end. However, it should be understood that the position of being white in this divided land was not straightforward. There was what might be called the pressure of racial ordering. Overall, the situation pointed to an unsettled whiteness where divisions remained. The central way of establishing the credentials of being white, of fitting

²⁰ United States Congress, Naturalization Act of 1870 (16 Stat. 254), section 7, 1870, <http://legisworks.org/sal/16/stats/STATUTE-16-Pg254a.pdf>

²¹ The 1870 Act while accommodating blacks also excluded the Chinese. For Republicans this contradiction was possible as: “blacks were citizens of the United States and entitled to the right to vote; the Chinese as a race were culturally and politically insufficient to acquire the status of American citizenship and therefore be enfranchised. In other words, black suffrage was ‘an act of justice’; Chinese suffrage was a ‘practical problem,’ not ‘a question of principle’” Wang, Xi. *The Trial of Democracy: Black suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860-1910*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 74, 75

²² The numbers were modified slightly in 1929. History Matters, “Who Was Shut Out?: Immigration Quotas, 1925–1927”, accessed 1 August 2016, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5078>

into mainstream, white culture, was in joining with other whites in the hostility towards the black population. The key form this took was to attempt by ethnic whites to distance themselves from blacks attempting to move into their ethnic enclaves in the city. The response to those blacks attempting to breach the colour line was often violent, through for example firebombing houses.

In Chapter 6, “Racial Separation”, the thesis covers how the racial outlook we have described that emerged in the late nineteenth century took on material form and was extended well into the twentieth century until at least the 1970s. This is the story of how blacks became literally a race apart in a wave of expulsions and exclusions of blacks across small-town America from the 1890s until the 1940s²³ combined with the mass internal migrations of whites-only suburbanisation until the 1970s. In this exposition we try to draw out the peculiar form in which this happened such that the divisions were seemingly the product of individual choice. We attempt to show how market mechanisms, though seeded and enabled by federal policy, were such that the market acted to discipline against racial integration through movements in house prices. In this period, the American Dream of white picket fences in a suburban setting was overwhelmingly for Americans of various European ancestries coming together as white. We develop the argument that the default narrative of successful civil rights campaigning in the South comes to obscure the divisions between whites and blacks that emerge on a national basis largely through this suburban migration.

The spatial separation of blacks and whites was enacted in the main through the expansion of the suburbs. In effect the white insecurity seen in the cities through the desire to literally distance themselves from blacks became more systematic with the development of mass suburbanisation which began at the turn of the twentieth

²³ Loewen, *Sundown Towns*; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*

century. Blacks were blocked from moving to the growing suburban locations. There were informal colour bars put in place by property developers. Additionally there were informal measures by realtors to block sales. Federal support for mortgages funded the enormous migration to all-white suburbs which broke down the white ethnic enclaves that had been a feature of the central cities. The overall process was supported by federal intervention in mortgage provision which made it extremely difficult for blacks to raise the financing to move to the growing white suburbs – should the hostility they would encounter or the informal bans not prove to be sufficient disincentive. In these all-white areas backed by federal monies, the market also acted to discipline against integration. House prices went down with any black inhabitants thus spurring those involved to block any sales to blacks. Consequently the most dynamic parts of the economy around the new suburban developments were no-go areas for blacks. Essentially the form that racial divisions took was that blacks were unable to take part in the expansion of the economy linked to the new suburban growth.

As the thesis discusses in Chapter 6, the suburbs should not merely be seen as new places to live. The development of the suburbs was essentially a political phenomenon in that they took the form of new self-governing locales. Increasingly from the 1910s the suburbs began to break away from the cities. The suburbs were the site of new structures of governance. In their independence they broke the political ties of ethnic whites with Tammany hall-style ethnically based voting blocs and reorganised interests around a vast host of smaller suburban enclaves. The politics involved were about distancing these new grouping from the material problems and perceived moral problems of the cities. In this process blacks who were associated with these problems were firmly excluded. This was influenced by

federal support but there was a strong and spontaneous grassroots movement dedicated to keeping blacks out. The politics of being white were played out in the divisions between the black ghettos of the cities and the all-white suburbs. The politics of race at the time were such that this process was not questioned.

Following the Second World War, the federal measures that sought to bring whites together and further distanced whites from blacks continued. State support for education provision through the GI Bill following the Second World War was overwhelmingly for whites and provided the means for new immigrant populations to play their part as much as “native” whites in the expansion of the economy in the post war boom. Notably during the war, as we discuss in Chapter 5, blacks were excluded from front line military service and employed in the war industries but denied access to unsegregated housing.

What becomes the most important institution to understand race in the USA in the twentieth century then was not the peculiar institution of Jim Crow, but rather the peculiar institution of an American Apartheid seemingly created not by legal mechanisms but through “discrimination”, the term used here in the sense of choice, i.e. whites spontaneously choosing to live separately from blacks. The caveat to this choice, of course, is the enormous backing this it received through the federal monies of the New Deal and measures that came with the end of the Second World War.

Race in this manifestation was primarily about bringing whites together such that previous divisions were overcome. The distancing from blacks, both physically and politically, acted to cohere whites by negative example, but was not its primary aim. What had been fractious politics of variegated white ethnicities and differing class

outlooks were turned into a combined whiteness. Blacks in this picture were a negative cultural point of reference. The hostility to blacks who seemingly did not fit the aspirational model of white America acted as a test of fitting-in with cultural norms. In previous years white ethnicities gained coherence as groupings or communities around which strategies for survival and advancement could be organised in the burgeoning cities. However, through the interventions that subsidised combined white living in the suburbs – where it was cheaper to buy than it had previously been to rent – this survival strategy was replaced by taking part in the expansion into the new all-white suburbs. Notably this is not the whiteness discussed in whiteness studies. It was not whiteness in general already established, but rather an attempt at establishing whiteness in common connected to the material success of an expanding economy.

A white race completed: the turnaround on race

In our historical-political model of race it becomes clear that as the twentieth century progressed the drive behind race as a means for white ethnics to be fully American, to create a combined whiteness, runs its course. It is in Chapters 7,8 and 9, the third part of the thesis “The Shifting Meaning of Race” that we look at the turnaround in race and its consequences, building on the analysis of race in its mainstream twentieth century form that we developed in the second part of the thesis.

Ethnic whites by the 1970s had become virtually indistinguishable white neighbours most often in all-white suburbs across the USA. Here the thesis makes the case that the dynamic behind these racial politics comes to an end because the goal it had been striving for had been reached. The point of race was as a means to overcome the problems of class, national background, ethnicity etc. which was the main

difficulty the US polity faced as the nineteenth century ended and the twentieth century progressed. These problems had been negotiated through the creation of a whiteness that allowed belonging and allowed for the evincing of differences in what might be called a racial ordering and which became a central part of the USA's political organisation. However, whites of all hues had by the 1970s become secure in their position as whites and became indistinguishable from one another by means of these previous ties, i.e. previous ethnic links played little or no political role. While being American and fitting into the white model had been very much a live issue for those moving to the new suburban locations, the new generations raised in suburbia felt none of these pressures. There was longer the pressing need to distance themselves from blacks as part of becoming fully American, i.e. white American, as had been the case with their parents and grandparents.

By the 1970s there was no longer momentum for the old racial politics: the insecurity of a position in the racial order based on the original difficulties of the late nineteenth century at least was no longer at issue. The pressure of the racial order so keenly felt in the earlier part of the century became increasingly irrelevant. The generational difference was important because the new generation had a very different experience to that of previous generations and no experience of the importance of race that their parents and grandparents had grown up with. Indeed once a light had been shone on these politics in the early 1970s – as civil rights questioned these arrangements – then new generations increasingly saw such racial politics as morally indefensible.

As illustration that the racial politics of the twentieth century were petering out, the thesis examines in Chapter 7 how the racial separation that underpinned the politics of race for most of the twentieth century is rapidly dismantled. From the 1970s on,

each decade saw a significant decrease in measures of segregation. About a third of this decrease can be accounted for by internal migration away from the heavily segregated North to less segregated Southern states. However, two thirds of the decrease was because levels of segregation throughout the USA decreased. This was possible because the absolute barriers to movement to the suburbs by blacks based on racial animus were removed. This was a major turnaround: although levels of segregation increased from the 1890s to the 1960s, by 2000 levels of segregation had decreased to numbers last seen in 1910.²⁴ Nonetheless, it should be noted that as of 2000, on average 59.1 per cent of a population would have to move out of individual census wards to match the overall racial proportions in the metropolitan regions those wards were in.²⁵ In other words, despite significant progress since 1970, the USA remains highly segregated, most significantly in North Eastern cities.

From race to place

The thesis has a model of race that shows why there was a turnaround in race from the 1970s. However, there have been factors that mean that this change has not been especially clear. There are two main factors covered at the end of Chapter 7 that disguise and to an extent mitigate this change.

The first is the conservative organisation of the main parties which has acted to shore up the idea of white constituencies. This was done by focusing policy on the needs of whites and by sidelining the problems of the inner cities and blacks. We use a model of party competition developed by Paul Frymer to explore how the idea that there were white bases of support as understood by the main political parties acted

²⁴ Jacob L. Vigdor, "Weighing and Measuring the Decline in Residential Segregation", *City & Community*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2013): 170.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

to bolster the connection between race and politics. In a conservative approach the parties acted to minimise any support for measures that might help blacks on the basis that this might be seen to undermine white support as they understood it. Frymer's analysis shows how the two main parties have worked to diminish the needs of blacks on the basis that winning votes from blacks reduces votes from whites. This is facilitated by the way in which black votes are, what Frymer calls, "captured". Capturing happens for blacks who are invested in the Democratic Party which then has little incentive to offer policy initiatives to gain their support. Nor do the Republicans offer incentives for blacks to switch. The Republican Party has little chance of gaining black support and are themselves invested in policies considered to be aimed at whites. This lack of competition is based on the assumption the parties made of white bases of support which are strongly if not implacably hostile to policies that might attempt to deal with the problems of the inner cities and consequently creates a conservative orientation towards policy. By their policy orientation the main parties have effectively extended and given shape to the racial divide.

The second and more important factor is the political setup that the American Apartheid left in its wake. The thesis examines how there is a politics of space that remains as the politics of race has diminished. The thousands of self-governing suburban municipalities are often hostile to raising taxes which are not spent within their often small boundaries. In effect they are oriented towards maintaining the existing social composition of their existing populations. Increasingly this is not a matter of race but rather of insularity. The objection is not to residents of other races but rather to spending on services on non-residents or for extra spending because new residents do not fit the existing patterns of income and social need. Despite the

withering away of racial animosity that stopped black movement, in effect the suburban governments are wary of taxation that might go outside the suburban boundaries to people of different backgrounds. The coming to a close of the politics of race is hidden in that it leaves in its wake a politics of space. The unintended consequence of the spatial separation that came with race was huge numbers of self-governing suburban locales which are often strongly oriented towards limiting spending on services that might not immediately benefit the local population and on enforcing zoning rules that limit changes to the type and cost of housing in a bid to maintaining their existing social composition.

In an important distinction, however, there is not a simple transition from suburban spaces that exclude blacks to suburban spaces that exclude any from outside those outside their successful middle class social strata. The politics of race have not simply been replaced by a politics of space. This is because unlike the uniform success of the post-war boom, in the uneven economic development of the USA since the major slowdown of the early 1970s, some areas have prospered while others have seen repeated recessions that have failed to fully heal. The lack of a uniform economic and social experience has been a suburban landscape which in many ways has become more varied than urban spaces.²⁶

²⁶ “The American suburbs have grown remarkably large and complex in the last several decades... [M]any suburbs have greater racial and age diversity than their core cities. Likewise, their share of typical urban dwellers (such as singles) continues to grow, now accounting for a larger percentage of households than families with children. The suburbs in all big metropolitan areas - except New York and Chicago - contain more office space than their central business districts. Suburbs essentially have all of the elements that make a place urban, but their physical arrangements sustain the popular depiction of suburbia as home to middle-class and wealthy white people.”, Robert E. Lang, Thomas W. Sanchez and Alan Berube, “The New Suburban Politics: A County-Based Analysis of Metropolitan Voting Trends Since 2000” in Ruy A. Teixeira (ed.), *Red, Blue, and Purple America: The Future of Election Demographics* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2009). Epub edition. 25-26

One axis of variation that seems to have political consequences is the connection between suburban spaces and the urban cores they are connected to. The thesis looks at attempts by demographers to link types of suburban space to votes which show a political pattern which in part reflects the relationship of suburban spaces to their urban cores. Overall there are politics where, rather than race, the relationships between urban and suburban spaces seem to create a set of political criteria which is reflected in voting patterns: put crudely a stronger connection to the urban core is positively correlated to Democratic support.²⁷ This analysis points to a set of political orientations not connected to race where voters see their interests in the context of the politics of space that comes out of the increasingly variegated suburban political landscape. The thesis develops the case that the political calculations of the USA's suburbs are better described as linked to the politics of suburbia rather than the politics of race. The assumption has been that white Americans are making decisions based on a racial outlook, despite their protestations to the contrary. Rather, the analysis we develop here suggests that the varied and changing economic and social relationships of the suburbs are richer and firmer ground from which to understand political motivations today than the uniform racial politics of the twentieth century.

Identity politics

The thesis attempts to explain why race in the 2008 election was disconnected from the idea of equality. It does this through an examination of the concept and practices of identity politics in Chapter 8 and 9. Essentially identity politics is the use of group membership as political criteria. The sociologist Daniel Bell writing in 1973 described

²⁷ Ibid.

this as a “new principle of rights”.²⁸ When it comes to race, this means that individuals are judged by their racial background rather than strictly on individual merit. The thesis examines how this approach was used as a means to manage race or ameliorate racial divisions in the form of affirmative action when large-scale attempts at using federal resources to bridge the racial gap were seen to fail in the 1960s. Since that time identity politics as a way of seeing race has expanded. The way in which in 2008 race was overwhelmingly understood through matters of identity bears this out. By using the model of identity politics we can see the importance ascribed to Obama’s blackness in the election. We attempt to show how the recognition and representation of racial group identities has become the main way in which race is understood and dealt with today.

Identity politics can be understood as an approach arising out of the impasse that liberal politics faced by the late 1960s. With Civil Rights success in the South, for a short time the racial divisions in the North were highlighted. President Johnson attempted to tackle these divisions as part of a series of “Great Society” programmes.²⁹ When it came to dealing with the problems of the inner cities, however, Johnson’s efforts were largely unsuccessful. The political will and the forces arrayed against Johnson were such that there was little ability to resolve the entrenched problems of poverty facing blacks in the inner cities. This is not to say that some of Johnson’s interventions did not have lasting benefits. The transfer payments established in this period helped to significantly reduce levels of poverty for some groups, for example. However, the separation of black life in the ghettos of the inner cities and the relative dynamism of mainstream US life seen, for

²⁸ Cited in John David Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action: Politics, Culture, and Justice in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), ix-x.

²⁹ See Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009 [1984]), chapter 8 and 9

example, in the white suburbs, remained. Johnson's attempts failed largely because the resources applied to the problem were insufficient. Such was the scale of the problems in the inner cities that the measures applied could not bring the inner cities into the American mainstream of development. Additionally, the resources applied were often captured by existing political players such that they do not go to the intended recipients. White mayors often captured policy initiatives for their own white constituencies meaning little headway was made.

Although affirmative action is, today, associated with the left, President Nixon was the author of the first significant affirmative action programmes.³⁰ Nixon was attempting to stabilise the situation in the inner cities following a number of years that saw rioting in the Northern cities. While, as we have seen, there had been huge initiatives to overcome the differences between whites in the past, no such political capital was available for blacks. Nixon did not campaign for equality or for the passing of new legislation. Rather by using executive orders, by means of presidential decree, Nixon set measures whereby federal employment had quotas for black employment. Further, Nixon linked federal grants to the states to affirmative action measures. Nixon used the division of powers in the USA to bypass democratic accountability. There was to be no winning of support for solidarity for the difficulties of the poor of the inner cities. Rather the federal bureaucracy and the opening up of means for litigation based on these measures allowed Nixon to implement support for middle class blacks in employment and in education. We make the case that accommodations with group differences shown in affirmative action were attempts to manage race with little confidence available in being able to overcome racial

³⁰ See Kevin L. Yuill, *Richard Nixon and the Rise of Affirmative Action: The Pursuit of Racial Equality in an Era of Limits*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006)

divisions. Identity politics in the form of affirmative action were the means through which Nixon attempted to deal with the inability to put through substantive measures that would deal with the problems of the inner cities and the divisions between white and black America. Essentially this was giving up on the idea that there could be significant material intervention that would improve the lot of those in the inner city as a means to overcome racial difference. There was an abandonment of the Great Society-style initiatives that sought to bring equality. These were seen as being too ambitious and could not raise the support for overcoming the gap between poor urban areas and the white advancement in the suburbs, i.e. for reversing several decades of policy.

Implementing affirmative action was no minor point: in effect it meant overturning previous ideas of equality and subverting legal norms. Where previously there was equality based on merit, this was replaced by benefits given on the basis of membership of racial groups. In effect precepts such as equality before the law were undermined on the basis that this might make amends for past injustices. Through affirmative action Nixon was, in his own words, “helping the strong”. Nixon’s approach helped give opportunities to a black middle class by providing employment opportunities in the federal and state workforces and by creating diffuse criteria for equal employment by major corporations who were bidding for government contracts. Affirmative action hiring was taken up by large corporations in that it created a barrier to entry for smaller competitors. New employment and educational openings helped solidify a black middle class that could take advantage of these opportunities.³¹

³¹ Kevin L. Yuill, *Richard Nixon and the Rise of Affirmative Action: The Pursuit of Racial Equality in an Era of Limits*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 177-178

Affirmative action attempted to manage race. There was no programme that attempted to overcome the divisions of race. Rather there was the idea that using the ascribed group characteristics of race it would be possible to help some blacks. The goal was not equality. There was no sense that race was to be overcome. There was the abandonment of large scale intervention that might seek to overcome problems of employment, education, housing etc. among blacks or in the inner cities.

In the past campaigners had attempted to have a state that made no decisions based on race as a means to overcoming discrimination and as a means to equality. In accepting this “new principle of rights”, however, race was to feature in decision making by the state. Previously campaigners had attempted to get public support, for solidarity, to overcome racial divisions. With the state now attached to opportunities for blacks, these campaigners were now engaged in negotiations as to the size of quotas for black advancement. Consequently campaigners often became supplicants to the state rather than look outward to their fellow citizens. Though ostensibly as a means to address inequality, in effect the use of racial categories entrenched these categories. While some on the left initially challenged affirmative action in the courts and through campaigning such campaigners were side-lined by the Democratic Party which supported affirmative action. This acceptance by the Democrats signalled that they too considered it was not plausible to overcome racial divisions through major programmes of intervention, or to campaign for support for such measures. Without major initiatives the idea of overcoming the racial divide and establishing equality had, in effect, been abandoned. The idea of removing racism had been replaced by the allocation of resources based on racial membership as a means to ameliorate the effects of racial divisions, in effect to manage these racial divisions.

Rather than the idea being that blacks could be judged by their character, by their achievements, there was a move towards providing employment because prospective employees were black. The presentation of the idea was that through government intervention the past disadvantages of blacks would be overcome given time. It is the contention here that through identity politics the connection between race and equality has been severely undermined. In accepting group, racial designations, the idea of overthrowing racial divisions becomes diminished. The recognition of identity, along with the racial designation, as a means to some advancement became a goal in itself. The goal of overcoming, of destroying racial categorisation, has been lost.

The thesis also considers how the use of racial criteria in managing resources has changed to further weaken its tenuous link with historical equality. The thesis uses Skrentny, a leading commentator on affirmative action, to update the picture of how identity politics is connected with how race is seen today. Identity politics has increasingly taken the form of what Skrentny calls “racial realism”.³² Partly because of legal attacks which see affirmative action as discriminatory, increasingly the justification for identity politics has moved away from a link to past injustices. Today racial realism has become an important justification for taking account of race. Racial realism is said to describe the benefits to organisations of using racial criteria. This takes the form of marking use of racial characteristics in organisational effectiveness or in racial signalling. In organisational effectiveness, the argument is that an organisation can benefit from workers who understand racial markets or can even take advantage of racial characteristics in working practices. In signalling, the idea is

³² John D. Skrentny, *After Civil Rights: Racial Realism in the New American Workplace* (Woodstock: Oxford University Press, 2014)

that an organisation can show it is modern and progressive through diversity in appointments. This change takes identity politics even further from a connection with matters of equality.

Major perspectives on race and the 2008 election

This introduction has gone through the major models, theories and ideas with which the thesis engages. As part of this it has outlined the political historical approach it uses and presented an outline of it. We now turn to situate the thesis among other attempts to understand the Obama election. Here we identify major perspectives when it comes to race and the 2008 election. It is against these views that this thesis is competing to explain the meaning of race in the election. Different elements of these perspectives are often merged and can overlap. Indeed there is inevitably some overlap in the major perspectives presented here and in the points made in the thesis. While we have arranged these perspectives in a particular way for clarity, it would be possible, however, to re-present these ideas by combining their elements in different ways. However, roughly speaking each perspective shown here also roughly corresponds to distinct takes on the meaning of race as emerged from the election.

There are four major views that we identify here: 1) race is not now a defining issue in US politics: it is one factor among many; 2) with Obama comes the development of post-racial politics which opens up new political possibilities; 3) Obama as a minority candidate symbolically heralds the future where whites as a minority within the electorate which may also mean an emerging Democratic majority; 4) Obama's victory further disguises white privilege which remains the contemporary form of racial domination. We now outline each of these perspectives in turn.

1) Race is not now a defining issue in US politics

One major perspective when it comes to race and the 2008 election is that the election can be analysed like any other election. There are several mainstream academic works that in covering the election barely raise the issue of race.³³ In this approach race is just one of the factors to take into account when adding up the effects on the electorate and the election result. And this effect might be relatively minor. For example, one work makes the case that race had little effect on white voters and this was shown in surveys where “By the time voters balloted, the majority had concluded that McCain’s age was more worrisome than Obama’s background, however defined.”³⁴ And although blacks voted overwhelmingly for Obama this was not seen to have wider ramifications. Rather it was issues such as an unpopular Republican president and a faltering economy that were important.

In this view, race does not play a special role in the election. Racial background becomes one among several ways of categorising the electorate, e.g. race, age, education, gender. Race in these readings is simply one of a number of factors in the election. For example, in one work, race was number 5 among 6 “keys” that helped Obama achieve victory. Race, expressed as “Barack Obama is an African-American”, helped Obama with support among the Democratic base.³⁵ The other keys were “change” and “post-partisanship”; Obama being a compelling individual;

³³ See, for example, James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, Jr., *Epic Journey: The 2008 Elections and American Politics* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009); Crotty, William J. ed. *Winning the Presidency 2008*. (Paradigm: Boulder, Co., 2009); Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money and Message Shaped the 2008 Election* (Oxford: OUP, 2010)

³⁴ Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money and Message Shaped the 2008 Election* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 106

³⁵ “[race] provided [Obama] with a crucial base of support inside the Democratic Party” in the primaries “race provided an enormous reservoir of goodwill and a source of moral authority for Obama with large parts of the educated white professional classes” James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, Jr., *Epic Journey: The 2008 Elections and American Politics* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 27

strong and innovative campaign organisation; the capacity to raise money; and, positive media coverage.³⁶

This standpoint is far from new though it is perhaps striking when seen in the context of the election of the first black president. It might be connected with the strong empirical current within US political analysis. Notably, the discussion of race was absent from US political science until the 1960s when the civil rights movement made race a live political issue and where it seemed that the electoral arithmetic might mean the racial outlooks of voters could lead to different electoral outcomes.³⁷ As we examine in Chapter 4, there has been a strong current within US political theory that understands race as outside of politics proper: race belongs, rather, in the field of psychology or group prejudice.³⁸ Racial prejudice is understood in this view as the private, irrational baggage that voters bring to the public, rational world of politics. With a downplaying of race in political discussion in 2008, one of the major perspectives seems to be a return to race playing a minor role in the mainstream academic analysis of US elections. An aspect of this may be because of the way that academia works: academic specialisation means that the discussion of race has its own expansive specialised literature often couched in terms of being about the black experience or black leadership. Similarly the discussion on realignment, for example, generally does not connect with works outside its sub-discipline. With the Obama election there is an attempt to “de-racialise” politics and policy and to the extent that this is successful there should be the expectation that this was reflected in the

³⁶ James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, Jr., *Epic Journey: The 2008 Elections and American Politics* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 15- 31

³⁷ Vincent L. Hutchings and Nicholas A. Valentino, “The Centrality of Race in American Politics”, *American Review of Political Science* (2004): 363.

³⁸ See Chapter 4.

tendency to de-racialise academic theories of elections including the 2008 election itself.

2) Post-Racial politics

The second approach to race in 2008 is that the Obama election is post-racial and that this opens up political possibilities for promoting and formulating universal colour-blind policies whereas in the past policies that even as a secondary effect might help blacks faced hostility based on race. Manning Marable, for example, the late civil rights scholar largely adopts this approach to understanding the meaning of the Obama election (Marable is used here extensively as a clear, representative and thorough source).

While Obama got the most publicity for his post-racial campaign, post-racial campaigns have increasingly been adopted, often successfully, by black politicians from the late 1980s. In constituencies with a large proportion of the electorate white, black politicians seemed to be faced with a “race ceiling” when it came to election to major offices, such as governor or mayor. In this approach candidates “refused to be identified as ‘black politicians’” or made it that they “happened to be black” but that this was unimportant.³⁹ Marable argues that “the Obama pre-campaign group recognized that most white Americans would never vote for a *black* presidential

³⁹ Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, “The Divided Mind of Black America: Race, Ideology and Politics in the Post-Civil-Rights Era” [1994] in Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, (London: Verso, 2009, 2nd ed.), 206. In Obama’s view, he was, “rooted in the black community, but not defined by it”. Obama [February 2007] cited in ” in Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke (eds.), *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America’s New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 167. Notably this formulation might be seem to overclaim Obama’s relationship with the black community.

candidate. However, they were convinced that most whites would embrace, and vote for, a remarkable qualified presidential candidate *who happened to be black*".⁴⁰

While this strategy seemed to work in that it got black representatives (who are more likely to address racial divisions) there were other factors behind these victories that suggested there may be support for policies that tackle social problems without race-based hostility. Marable argues that there were two factors that made "inevitable rise and breakout of a leader of African descent like a Barack Obama".⁴¹ The first was a larger non-white electorate (we discuss this in the next perspective). The second, and just as important, "there was a major liberalization of white racial attitudes towards black culture and leadership, in which the historic animus and resistance many whites displayed toward blacks was significantly reduced"⁴² The amount of white support and, in particular, young white support lays behind the new possibilities: "Above all, [Obama's] political attractiveness to a substantial minority of white voters is unprecedented and momentous, with the support of young white voters at times especially impressive."⁴³

Consequently there is the opening up of policies that can be discussed in a race-neutral way. With the accommodation with racial politics comes the idea that there might be the application of race-neutral measures to tackle problems with poverty, in housing, employment and other social democratic style measures. This is based on the idea that racial motivations have been overcome which allows for a discussion of policy without hostility based on racial prejudice. There is the possibility of developing and implementing a non-racial set of policies to be applied based on

⁴⁰ Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White*, (London: Verso, 2009, 2nd ed.), 302

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xxvii

⁴² *Ibid.*, xxvi-xxvii

⁴³ David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (London, Verso: 2008), 217

need. This perhaps represents an opening up of the polity to taking black interests more seriously (as part of broader social problems) and connecting black interests with white interests.

This connected with Obama's argument that the best approach to dealing with racial matters was indirect. Rather than race-based solutions, it would be general attempts to tackle the material problems that faced the USA in general that could tackle race relations. Caught off-guard, in a rare moment, Obama discussed this approach explicitly:

"I'm not somebody who believes that constantly talking about race somehow solves racial tensions. I think what solves racial tensions is fixing the economy, putting people to work, making sure that people have health care, ensuring that every kid is learning out there. I think if we do that, then we'll probably have more fruitful conversations."⁴⁴

In many ways this might be understood as a rhetorical point. It was one of the race occasions where Obama discussed the material problems affecting blacks. The point seems moot because there were few initiatives by Obama race neutral or otherwise that could make a dent in US racial divisions. Even Obama's signature policy, his healthcare plans, made little difference to the relative position of blacks, suggesting that only a more systematic intervention, for example based around revitalising the cities, could really affect relative the poverty of many blacks.

For some, racially based opposition to programs that might tackle social problems remains. For Tim Wise, such is the coded racism that in the USA simply the mention

⁴⁴ Helene Cooper, "Attorney General Chided for Language on Race", New York Times, 7 March 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/08/us/politics/08race.html>

of the word welfare and immediately there are connection made to the black inner cities: “There is a “racialization of social policy...the public, and particularly the white public, already views government spending on behalf of the have-nots or have-lessers, in racialised terms.” When Obama says he is “advocating colorblind universal programs to help all in need,... most white Americans *hear* something else altogether...racial redistribution”. Indeed part of the hostility to welfare according to Wise is that politicians are attempting to mislead the public about the recipients of the policy. Wise argues that politicians would get more support if they argued explicitly for help for poor inner city blacks on the basis that this was a call for fairness.⁴⁵

As well as opening up politics, the emphasis on post-racial politics can also be seen as closing down some options. Writing in with 1994 with Leith Mullins, Marable called what we might now identify as early examples of a post-racial strategy by new black leaders as what he called “post-black”. This was, in effect, the closing down of old civil-rights style campaigning – at least at the level of mayors and governors.⁴⁶ As Marable argues, with Obama’s adoption of a post-racial approach: “Obama does not represent the triumph of an advancing anti-racist movement but rather the necessity, at the highly refracted level of electoral politics, of abandoning old agendas, largely by not mentioning them.”⁴⁷

3) Obama’s victory signals whites becoming the minority

⁴⁵ Tim Wise, *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity* (San Francisco: City lights, 2010), Chapter 2: Post Racial. E-book.

⁴⁶ Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, “The Divided Mind of Black America: Race, Ideology and Politics in the Post-Civil-Rights Era” [1994] in Manning Marable *Beyond Black and White*, (London: Verso, 2009, 2nd ed.), 205-206.

⁴⁷ Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History*, 227

The third perspective is that race and the Obama victory were connected through the symbolism of a non-white president signalling a new era where whites were to be the minority in the USA. Obama, in this view, can be seen as representing the demographic decline of whites and the increasing importance of minority voters. This was a point that has constantly been stressed in coverage of the elections. As Henry has it, Obama's racial background is particularly apposite to the USA's anticipated demographic changes:

“Obama's personal family history has raised the recognition of the mixed or hybrid character of American history to a new level. In less than forty years the United States will be roughly equally divided between Whites and people of color.”⁴⁸

Obama as a minority candidate represents the demographic shift away from a white dominated politics. Further, his bi-racial background connects with the idea that there will be an inter-mixing taking place that will lessen the importance of the black-white binary in US racial politics today. Connected as it is with immigration of a number of third world or developing countries, this demographic change is often described as the “browning of America”⁴⁹.

We discuss this change at more length in Chapter 9. However, at this stage it is worth making some points for clarity. We can note that the time where whites are in a minority seems to be some time away (although some expect whites to be a minority as early as 2042⁵⁰, however in terms of a nation's meaning the changes

⁴⁸ Charles P. Henry, “Toward a Multiracial Democracy: The Jackson and Obama Contributions” in Charles P. Henry, Robert L. Allen and Robert Chrisman (eds.) *The Obama Phenomenon: Toward a Multiracial Democracy* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 28

⁴⁹ Christopher Caldwell, “The Browning of America”, Caldwell Review of Books, 9 March 2015, accessed 1 August 2016, <http://www.claremont.org/crb/article/the-browning-of-america/>

⁵⁰ Ruy Teixeira, “Is there (still) an emerging progressive majority in the United States”, 19 January 2010, accessed 1 August 2016, http://sens-public.org/article.php3?id_article=723&lang=en

might be described as happening now. This is a change that is greeted with hostility by some and with pleasure by others. Further although the idea that whites are in a minority might seem straightforward demographic fact, this is not the case because of the character of whiteness. In central ways whiteness should be understood as political rather than biological. This becomes clear when discussing Latinos. It is uncertain whether Latinos (or the children of whites and Latinos) might be, in the future, considered white or not. This is ultimately a political question. One need think of Latino politicians who have stood for the Republican candidate for the presidency such as Ted Cruz who seem to be for all intents and purposes white.

4) Colour-blind racism

The fourth perspective is that Obama's victory does not tackle the source of racism in the USA which is seen as being white privilege. Rather by seeming to make colour-blind fairness the norm, this strengthens white domination. This standpoint is connected with whiteness studies scholarship which we discuss in more detail in Chapter 9.

The Obama approach is seen as problematic because it stresses a colour-blind approach to race. For the whiteness studies school and associated writers⁵¹, this is there is norm of whiteness, of unearned advantages, that are simply assumed by whites. This is done in employment, housing, culture etc. This is done prior to politics as "cultural background" such that it is seen as simply "how it is" or natural. A colour-blind approach does not test or question these norms and so white privilege

⁵¹ For example, Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 4th ed. (New York: Rowman Littlefield, 2014). [ebook]; Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Tim Wise, *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity* (San Francisco: City lights, 2010), Chapter 2: Post Racial. E-book.

goes unquestioned. In other words, systematic white privilege is unaffected by formal equality because it is done through cultural assumptions made by networks of whites and white-dominated institutions. As Jeffries argues:

“Even if individuals no longer affirm racist beliefs, the institutions that order our social lives, such as banks, schools, and the criminal justice complex, utilize practices and policies that maintain and strengthen white dominance.”⁵²

Jeffries follows the general thrust of several authors generally associated with the whiteness studies school who make the case that despite the Obama victory which might well seem to be a “massive blow to white privilege and the existing racial order” that “drastic racial and ethnic inequalities, prejudice and stereotyping, and the marginalization of nonwhite people from positions of power persist today”⁵³ In effect, the lack of whites espousing racial ideas and the connected symbolism of Obama’s victory do not alter the mechanisms of discrimination that continue in the USA today. If anything given there is an assumption that the USA is a colour-blind society white privilege is strengthened having supposedly passed the test of fairness.

Through these mechanisms whiteness remained as a system of privileges, and blacks (and other minorities) retain their second class status. The argument behind this view of race is that whiteness itself needs to be tackled. There needs to be a race conscious approach to targeting white privilege (which is “a collective, implicit acceptance of whiteness as virtuous, normal, unremarkable, and expected.”)⁵⁴ There is a combination of whites who argue they are not racist and have a colour-blind approach yet at the same time there are massive divisions between blacks and

⁵² Michael P. Jeffries, *Paint the White House Black: Barack Obama and the Meaning of Race in America*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 4

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2

whites. In other words, “the institutional foundation for racism remains intact despite a reduction in attitudinal antipathy towards racial others.”⁵⁵ As we argue in chapter 9, the idea of whiteness has become a commonly cited, if not default, theory explaining racial divisions in the USA today because it purports to explain racial divisions when whites themselves seem not to be racist.

This thesis

This thesis attempts to understand the role of race in the 2008 election. Its argument is that this can be done through its connection to the dissolution of the patterns of race established in the twentieth century. The Obama election has brought some of that change to a head and has highlighted and strengthened other aspects of racial politics.

Through a historical political analysis, the thesis links race in its twentieth century form with the attempt to create a combined whiteness as a way of overcoming the divisions between different groups of whites in class, religion, national background and ethnicity. Its contention is that this process is complete by the 1970s and as a consequence the impetus behind racial organising lessens. This provides space for removing race from the political agenda. With the job of uniting whites complete, race in its twentieth century form especially as connected to equality had come to be on balance experienced as a destabilising and unproductive, even destructive, force rather than a useful one. In other words, it created more conflict and divisions than it resolved through creating a cross class alliance and unifying whites (a task, anyway, in the main complete). Consequently there is an incentive for moving past race understood in connection with equality at least. For the Democrats, racial politicking

⁵⁵ Michael P. Jeffries, *Paint the White House Black: Barack Obama and the Meaning of Race in America*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013),4

raised demands for equality that it had to deal with from the left or else seemed to bring gains to the Republicans who could use racial animus to attack Democrat programmes associated with black or ethnic minority interests (although it could be argued that Republicans were deploying suburban insularity to attack spending on the urban poor). Either way, one might agree that from Obama's perspective that having to manage difficulties associated with race and equality, for the Democrats had acted as a distraction for many years. For the Republicans race animated a disruptive section of its base including populist elements which made it difficult to win votes from ethnic minorities, which would increasingly become a problem, or appeal to the centre. Especially for a technocratic approach race and the opposition to race made government more difficult.

Through the leadership of a minority candidate, a post-racial politics could be put forward by the Democrats. This could be done through the use of identity politics as with a black presidential candidate such as Obama there was sufficient cachet and moral weight to make the case for a post-racial approach in the election campaign. Essentially a post-racial strategy would attempt a deconstruction of race through the idea that we are simply individuals with individual identities following our interests i.e. rather than the American Dream there are many American Dreams. Further, the involvement of millions of whites in the campaigning signalled that individual whites no longer connected with the mass racial politics of the past. Indeed with this approach the victory of the candidate itself would count as part of the post-racial argument.

It should be noted that in addition to the space provided by twentieth century racial politics coming to a conclusion, the weakness on the left and in the remnants of the civil rights movement (shown, for example, in their "post-black" approach) also

helped in that not only did such forces provide no opposition they ended up rallying behind the Obama cause.

As well as bringing the post-racial change to a head, the election also acted to highlight and strengthen other trends: these were identity politics and the culture wars especially in regard to the questioning and even attacks on whiteness.

At the same time as the post-racial campaign the thesis makes the case that there is a parallel action of identity politics. Identity politics has long been the way in which racial politics has been managed. The way this acted was that demands for recognition based on ascriptive racial group membership acted as an alternative to and undermined demands for equality. The campaign strengthened trends in support of identity politics through Obama's success, i.e. the power and weight of symbolism, representation and identity became clear in the election.

Obama's victory does not bring colour-blind/race neutral measures to deal with race. Rather it relies on racially conscious identity politics in the form of therapeutic interventions such as regulation of behaviour through for, example, codes of behaviour in the workplace on the one hand and the minimised support for arguments for equality on the other.

Obama's victory also highlighted the demographic shift towards a minority white electorate. Although because whiteness is a political rather than a natural construct, in actual fact it is far from clear how racial identifications will be made in the future, this is not how it is seen or presented. There is a sense of support for a move towards minority oriented identity politics (what might be called a post-white change) partly because it is seen to represent something of a *fait accompli*.

Far from there being the continuity of a system of white privilege, there are currently quite broad attacks on white culture which might be seen as part of the culture wars. Indeed the idea of subconscious system of white privilege found in whiteness studies forms part of that attack. The politicisation of culture has seen hostility towards whiteness as backward, irrational, racist etc. While these arguments rarely featured in the Obama election directly, they are general trends with which the Obama election connected.

Arguments that attempt to explain racial divisions based on whiteness have gained quite broad traction nowadays. With the longstanding rejection of racial politics by whites, attempts to explain the broad racial divisions there are today either through the sub consciousness of whites or else through institutional practice have become default explanations. However, it is possible to make the case that blacks remain in a subordinate position because there have been no measures that attempt to transform material circumstances i.e. programmes of investment and development in the cities. Indeed there has been little in the way of campaigns for equality and there have been no campaigns that have elicited the support of whites across the colour-line in support of such a goal. Essentially, without any political pressure for substantial material change the black poor by and large remain particularly poor. The slow growth and lack of social mobility mean that individual solutions to problems, i.e. individual success stories, do not tend to have an overall transformative effect.

Main questions in the thesis

The main question the thesis engages with is “what role was played by race in the 2008 US presidential election?” In doing this we also attempt to answer particular questions that are raised with the election. We attempt to answer “how do we

account for the enthusiasm that came with the Obama campaign?” and “why was race largely discussed without reference to equality in 2008?” In attempting to understand the phenomenon that underpinned Obama’s victory we also attempt to answer ““how did racial factors and racial thinking change during the twentieth century?” as part of an attempt to create a political-historical view of race as it was constituted in the twentieth century.

Part I

Examining the 2008 election

Chapter 1. An Exceptional Election

One of the main purposes of the chapter is to provide an overview of the election and of the discussions of race that takes place around the election for subsequent chapters. By providing an overview in Chapter 1 this allows the following chapters to be read in the context of the 2008 election discussions and of the idea of race raised in the election. The chapter uses several books that attempt to assess the meaning of the election.¹ Overall, as per one of the main critiques of the thesis, they are limited because they understand the election either in terms of the significance of the racial background of Obama or in terms of the racial views of whites.

Another of the main purposes of the chapter is to assess the meaning of post-racial. This is done using a detailed analysis of the main speeches made by Obama and by drawing on Obama's two biographies.² It is in speeches where Obama discusses hope or race where post-racial ideas emerge. The chapter also uses works from the remnants of the civil rights tradition. These do not directly take up post-racial ideas in their arguments and were limited to criticisms of Obama as not paying sufficient attention to particular civil rights campaigns or else as not being sufficiently black, in the sense of having a black immigrant's experience rather than the more typical

¹ Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke (eds.), *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America's New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Ricky L. Jones, *What's Wrong with Obamamania?: Black America, Black Leadership, and the Death of Political Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); Jeffries, Michael P. *Paint the White House Black: Barack Obama and the Meaning of Race in America*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.; Joeseeph, Peniel E. *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama*. New York, BasicCivitas, 2010; Henry, Charles P., Robert L. Allen and Robert Chrisman, eds. *The Obama Phenomenon: Toward a Multiracial Democracy*. Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011.; Kenski, Kate, Bruce W. Hardy, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money, and Message Shaped the 2008 Election*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.; Ledwidge, Mark, Kevern Verney, and Inderjeet Parmar. *Barack Obama and the Myth of a Post-Racial America*. London: Routledge, 2014.

² Obama, Barak. *The Audacity of Hope*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008 [2006]; Obama, Barak. *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007 [2004].

experience of being brought up black in the inner city. The chapter also uses detailed journalistic accounts of the campaign to flesh out the overall picture of the campaign where necessary.³

The 2008 election was seen as being of historic significance by many, largely because of the election of a black president. Polls shortly after the election reflected the public view that this was a historic moment for blacks and by extension for race in the USA. A *USA Today*/Gallup poll on 5 November 2008, the day after the election, showed 33 per cent thought Obama's success "the most important advance for blacks in the last one hundred years". A further 38 per cent considered it "one of the most" important advances in the last 100 years. Only one in ten considered it as "not that important".⁴ The slogans of "yes we can", "hope" and "change" had rubbed off onto the mood of the same respondents: 67 per cent described themselves as optimistic, 67 per cent as proud and 59 per cent as excited. Historians surveyed in 2014 – although an eye-blink of time from which to judge – thought that the Obama victory in 2008 would stand the test of time as a notable historic moment. Asked to assess the legacy of Barack Obama for *New York* magazine, 53 responded and "Almost every respondent wrote that the fact of [Obama] being the first black president will loom large in the historical narrative". Most saw this as being because of "the symbolism of a nonwhite First Family".⁵

³ Richard Wolffe. *Codename: Renegade: The Inside Account of How Obama Won the Biggest Prize in Politics*. London: Virgin Books, 2010.; John Heilemann and Mark Halperin. *Race of a Lifetime*. London: Penguin, 2010

⁴ "Campaign 2008", PollingReport.com, 2015, accessed 10 April 2015, <http://www.pollingreport.com/wh08.htm>

⁵ Others reasons given for why 2008 would be remembered were because of the "antagonism Obama's blackness provoked" or "the way [Obama's] racial self-consciousness constrained him". Both of these reasons seem questionable. While there was something of an antagonistic attitude to the presidency by Republicans under Obama, which was certainly not improved by racial considerations, hostility to the president has increasingly become a feature of recent years; the

At least while it lasted the 2008 presidential election reinvigorated and renewed US politics. The Iowa caucuses, first stop on the road to prospective presidential nominations, saw a record estimated 334,000 pack public venues across the state – up from 212,000 in 2004 – and Democrat turnout almost doubled.⁶ The historian Simon Schama, present in the state capital Des Moines that night, described it as the moment that US democracy “came back from the dead”.⁷ Obama’s official online campaign, Organizing for America at “my.barakobama.com”, allowed the candidate to spurn public campaign funds, raising over half a billion dollars from three million people,⁸ even creating problems of what to do with the money. On victory night, “spontaneous crowds of joyful celebrants rushed into streets, parks, and public establishments in thousands of venues across the country” and people in Harlem were “crying in disbelief”.⁹ As one commentator observed, the staid election victories of recent decades were replaced with something akin to the public celebrations of

treatment of Bill Clinton being a prominent example. Obama’s racial self-understanding notwithstanding while many may have pegged him as a liberal he was much more constrained by his centrist political instincts. “53 Historians Weigh In on Barack Obama’s Legacy”. *New York* magazine, 11 January 2015, accessed 10 April 2015, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/01/53-historians-on-obamas-legacy.html>

⁶ In 2004, about 124,000 Democrats and 88,000 Republicans turned out; in 2008, this was 220,000 and 114,000. Adam Nagourney, “Obama Triumphs in Iowa Contest as Clinton Falter; Huckabee Rolls”, *New York Times*, 3 January 2008, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/03/us/politics/03cnd-campaign.html>

⁷ Simon Schama, *The American Future: A History from the Founding Fathers to Barack Obama* (London: Vintage, 2009), 1.

⁸ See Jemima Kiss, “Why Everyone’s a Winner”, *Guardian*, 10 November 2008, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/nov/10/obama-online-strategy>; Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money and Message Shaped the 2008 Election* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 310. Taking public funding would have limited the campaign’s spending to \$84million plus central party support. The campaign organisers were initially very nervous about the decision, see Richard Wolffe, *Codename: Renegade: The Inside Account of How Obama Won the Biggest Prize in Politics* (London: Virgin Books, 2010), 210-213; John Heilemann and Mark Halperin, *Race of a Lifetime* (London: Penguin, 2010), 327-328

⁹ Manning Marable, “Introduction: Racializing Obama: The Enigma of Postblack Politics and Leadership” in Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke (eds.), *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America’s New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

the nineteenth century and, at least for a short while, political cynicism disappeared.¹⁰

Rather than a particular set of policies or programme, more visceral factors seemed to drive public involvement. An examination of Obama's political outlook and previous record reveal a mainstream, if relatively liberal, figure, that cannot account for the outpouring of expectation and desire unleashed among supporters.¹¹ A collapse in support for President Bush had meant that his record was not strongly defended by Republicans and there was approaching a cross-party consensus on the major issues of the day, both on the need to withdraw from Iraq and to bail out the banks. There was no policy or grouping of policies that might explain public enthusiasm. Rather it seemed that the theme of "hope" and the possibility of transcending race that came with a black President which seemed to enervate the electorate.

Obama's message of "hope" had captured the public imagination. Much of this was based on his own "compelling life story"¹² set out in the autobiographical works, *Dreams of My Father* (1995) and *The Audacity of Hope* (2006). These best-selling, critically acclaimed mediations on the American dream, of both making and re-making it, ensured the candidate's story was almost universally known. Sarah Palin, in her acceptance speech as Republican Vice Presidential candidate, mocked

¹⁰ Thomas Edge, "Southern Strategy 2.0: Conservatives, White Voters, and the Election of Barack Obama", *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (January 2010): 427.

¹¹ Ricky L. Jones, *What's Wrong with Obamamania?: Black America, Black Leadership, and the Death of Political Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 16-18; that the argument on universal health care was not made a campaign issue could be seen in the problems for Obama in establishing support for a bill once in office.

¹² Asked what Obama thought of Palin in a CBS interview shortly after she was unveiled as McCain's running mate, his first words were, tellingly: "She has a compelling life story." CBS News, "Obama Explains His Choice, Reacts To Palin", CBS 60 Minutes Interview, 31 August 2008, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/08/30/60minutes/main4400811.shtml>

Obama as having “authored two memoirs but not a single major law or even a reform, not even in the State Senate”.¹³ As state senator, many of his bills – whether major or not – had been enacted,¹⁴ but Palin, highlighting Obama’s political inexperience to contrast McCain’s seniority, was missing the point. The narrative of distance from and not being of Washington was a vital part of Obama’s appeal. In contrast, the lack of an effective story for the Republican candidate led the McCain team to try and then discard six competing narratives of their own during the campaign.¹⁵

But what was it that the electorate were to “hope” for exactly? It seemed that in the absence of a clear programme,¹⁶ more often than not the electorate were able to invest their own individual hopes in the person of the candidate. Already in 2006, in an interview with Obama when US Senator, one journalist noted that Obama took on “the quality of a blank screen on which people can project whatever they like” – and that, as a consummate politician, “he hasn’t discouraged this”.¹⁷ It was no accident that Obama’s online campaign was at “my” barakobama.com: it was possible to

¹³ Sarah Palin, Transcript “Palin’s Speech at the Republican National Convention”, New York Times website, 3 September 2008, accessed 29 March 2011, http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/president/conventions/videos/transcripts/20080903_PALIN_SPEECH.html

¹⁴ In his six years in the state senate Obama had 30 bills enacted that he sponsored directly. Randolph Burnside and Kami Whitehurst, “From the Statehouse to the White House?: Barack Obama’s Bid to Become the Next President”, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 38 (September 2007): 81.

¹⁵ Robert Draper, “The Making (and Remaking and Remaking) of McCain”, *New York Times Magazine*, 26 October 2008 reprinted in Royce Flippin (ed.) *Best American Political Writing 2009* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009).

¹⁶ Obama shifted away from detailed policy pronouncements early in his campaign to more general stump speeches about change. Those policies were available on his website, but played little role in the campaign. CBS News, “Barack Obama Makes His Case”, CBS 60 Minutes Interview, 10 February 2008, accessed 29 March 2011, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/02/07/60minutes/main3804268_page2.shtml

¹⁷ David Sirota, “Mr. Obama Goes to Washington”, *The Nation*, 26 June 2006, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://www.thenation.com/article/mr-obama-goes-washington?page=full> Obama uses almost the same formulation in 2006: that he is a blank screen for people to project their own views, ascribing it to his newness on the national political stage. Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008 [2006]), 11.

construct your own. Even with the intensity of the election, seemingly formless slogans such as “hope” and “yes, we can” remained largely unchallenged. One reason, perhaps, was because calls for “change” equally devoid of content had featured so consistently across the political spectrum in recent decades. Another was that Obama’s version of Democrat policy was not, at the time at least, considered sufficiently contentious or newsworthy.¹⁸

The other force propelling the campaign was race, or rather the attempt to transcend the issue of race. This, as we discuss in more depth in the next chapter, was perhaps linked to “hope” figuring as the aspiration to finally move past racial division. And Obama was the quintessential “post-racial” candidate. It was a speech to the Democratic National Convention in 2004 which brought him to national prominence, where he argued, “There’s not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there’s the United States of America”.¹⁹ Undoubtedly as only the third black person elected to the US Senate since Reconstruction ended in 1877 and as a veteran of community organising in the racially segregated wards of Chicago, these words carried weight.²⁰ In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama “offers a word of caution” to those interpreting this speech as meaning that “we have arrived at a ‘post racial politics’ or that we already live in a color-blind society”, both racial inequality and racism still matter.²¹ But here he fails, perhaps, to acknowledge the novelty of what post-racial means and how he contributes to it.

¹⁸ The later reaction to the healthcare plan is perhaps an indication that it became a policy through which to focus opposition with Obama in office.

¹⁹ Barack Obama, “Transcript: Illinois Senate Candidate Barack Obama”, Washington Post website, 27 July 2004, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A19751-2004Jul27.html>

²⁰ Roy L. Brooks, *Racial Justice in the Age of Obama* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), xi.

²¹ Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007), 232-233.

There has been a working assumption by many using the term that post-racial simply means moving past racial views in politics, that the “post” in “post-racial” plays a similar role to the “post” in “post-war”. However, post-racial might better be understood in a different way, where the “post” takes on the meaning ascribed to it in “post-modern”. Postmodern was itself an incongruous semi-philosophical term that entered into mainstream vocabulary without necessarily a clear understanding of the abstruse viewpoint or writings behind it.²² Likewise, post-racial’s entry into the political lexicon reflects something new and undigested. The appearance and novelty of the term post-racial should be noted. It derives from an individualised, post-modern outlook, rather than from a collective, structural or policy based approach. A post-racial politics is not simply an argument that racism no longer exists nor matters. Rather the implication of post-racial is, following postmodernism, that what was the meta-narrative of race can dissolve into the many narratives of individual lives.²³ Previously race evoked such a response that it resisted deconstruction²⁴ – in the USA it was often considered as a fundamental divide in the polity, as an unhealed schism running through society and even as an organising principle that the state and parties wrestled with. Now it might instead be better seen as part of the

²² As Jameson notes “The success story of the word Postmodernism demands to be written, no doubt in bestseller format; such lexical neoevents, in which the coinage of a neologism has all the reality impact of a corporate merger, are among the novelties of media society which require not merely study but the establishment of a whole new media lexicological subdiscipline. Why we needed the word *Postmodernism* so long without knowing it, why a truly motley crew of strange bedfellows ran to embrace it the moment it appeared, are mysteries that will remain unclarified until we have been able to grasp the philosophical and social function of the concept, something impossible, in its turn, until we are somehow able to grasp the deeper identity between the two.” Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1991), xii.

²³ This borrows from the formulation that postmodernism is an “incredulity” towards meta-narratives from Jean-François Lyotard cited in Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989). See also Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Hemel Hempstead: Pearson Education, 1993).

²⁴ Eric King Watts. “The (Nearly) Apocalyptic Politics of “Postracial” America: Or “This is Now the United States of Zombieland””, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2010): 210.

many individual stories that made up the many individual American Dreams, or indeed the many individual “hopes”. A post-racial politics would not deny racial inequality in the face of myriad statistics of racial disadvantage. Rather there is a reclassification of the scope of race as a problem. For one author this is seen as being made possible through “mental gymnastics” on the part of post-racial supporters taken together with a population eager to mark out that they had moved on from discrimination and support for inequality through the attribution of “post”.²⁵ With a declaration of the USA as “post-racial” problems of race might be safely and now publicly reintegrated into the mainstream of consumer and individual choice and behaviour, and therefore of regulation and policy of an already “colour-blind” state.²⁶ Race might then become an inter-personal issue rather than a schism in the body politic.

Obama’s personal narratives – bringing race into the contemporary American dream – are a redefinition of the racial problem/question, a viewpoint strengthened and validated by the symbolism of election to presidential office. Throughout the campaign, the Obama camp downplayed race as public issue while leaving the embodied form of the candidate to speak for itself. The Republicans made little mention of race at all. This reached such a point that an interviewer noted that the Republicans and Democrats had barely even commented Obama’s candidacy was

²⁵ Mary Douglas Vavrus discusses the application of “post” (though in the form of “post-feminism”) thus: “Such persistence in these patterns [of inequality] would seem to require both mental gymnastics on the part of these representations’ producers, along with a population eager to move discrimination and inequality behind the cemetery gates, into the graveyard bounded by the ‘post’”. Mary Douglas Vavrus, “Unhitching from the “Post”(of Postfeminism)”, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2010): 223.

²⁶ Since 2000 the US Census allows respondents to choose more than one race or ethnicity, facilitating a choice of identity. Again Obama’s hybrid ethnic/racial background allows the candidate to embody the discussion. See Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 2-6; And on race as a product of individual behaviour, *ibid.*, 72-74.

such a milestone for black people in the USA. Obama quipped that people had probably noticed.²⁷

When the issue of race forced itself to the surface through Obama's relationship to former pastor Reverend Jeremiah Wright whose radical sermons had circulated on the internet, this gave Obama a chance to rehearse the post-racial message in its American form as outlined above, using the plain-spoken "story" rather than narrative:

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 – towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren. This belief comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people. But it also comes from my own American story.²⁸

Here "hope" is brought in to address a lowest common denominator of a better future – and even then for the children.²⁹ Later in the speech he reinterprets race as the narratives of different American dreams: "It requires all Americans to realize that

²⁷ CBS News, "Obama Explains His Choice, Reacts To Palin". Throughout, Steve Kroft's interviews for CBS 60 Minutes were laudably direct in raising race with Obama.

²⁸ Barack Obama, "Obama Race Speech: Read the Full Text", *The Huffington Post*, 18 March 2008, accessed 29 March 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/18/obama-race-speech-read-th_n_92077.html

²⁹ Reference to "our children's futures" rather than "our futures" is a notable aspect of contemporary rhetoric that speaks to problems of establishing both shared and individual meaning. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), chapter 2 and Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 6.

your dreams do not have to come at the expense of my dreams”.³⁰ The Obama campaign sought to stand above race as an issue – as Obama argued in his speech, race had played the role of a “distraction”³¹ for many cycles in US politics. It could be raised here cathartically to acknowledge it and then to argue for a response that addressed concerns in general, reintegrating racial division into the polity as just one aspect of social policy/regulation. Then race could for all intents and purposes be ignored: this was, after all, “the” Obama speech on race.

The Democrat’s reticence on race is influenced by the role race has played in the ideological battles of the post-civil rights period – from the late 1960s. Although overt racism has become electoral suicide in US politics, other factors have long seemed to act as stand-ins for direct racial politics. Debates on “welfare mothers”, the “underclass”, the absent black father, hip hop culture and even negative comparisons with “model minorities” have refocused concerns about the position of blacks to their own cultural predilections and brought into question liberal policy responses. Even the standard issues of tax and crime have often seemed to act as vehicles for a discussion on race. For the past thirty years liberals have been on the defensive with these race-related issues. The liberal agenda is portrayed as soft on crime, wasting taxpayers’ money on undeserving poor blacks, or being reverse racist in affirmative action – issues that have resonated with sections of the white electorate.³² Conservatives have been able to undermine the liberal post-war outlook, at least in part, through race, by arguing that government welfare programmes in the inner cities have created dependency and demoralisation by undermining self-reliance and have tilted the balance against hard working and often

³⁰ Obama, “Obama Race Speech”.

³¹ Obama, “Obama Race Speech”.

³² Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 201-209.

hard pressed whites.³³ In particular through the “Southern Strategy”, the Republicans have been understood as pursuing an electoral strategy which attempted to attract support on the basis of racial signalling – initially in the South then then more widely – using race-related issues, such as opposition to welfare or in calls for law and order crackdowns, as “wedge” issues to divide Democrat support.

Obama’s post-racial politics cede a great deal of ground to conservative attacks which can be seen as following a long trend of Democrats accommodation to cultural criticisms of black lifestyles and culture.³⁴ Although not wishing to make race an issue, the candidate, nonetheless, repeatedly signalled his concern with the moral problems of black families and culture.³⁵ And it could be argued that that such post-racial politics, in a similar way to postmodernism, are profoundly conservative in that they dismiss broad policy approaches as “meta-narratives”.³⁶ However, in the context of the election a post-racial approach can be seen as an attempt to both remove the sting from Republican attacks and undermine a perceived bloc of white support. As one commentator noted, post-racial is at the same time post-white.³⁷ White support might be seen to have been undermined, but one response intimated that the type of politics that is associated by many with whiteness was not completely

³³ Ibid., 31-33.

³⁴ John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Why America is Different* (London: Penguin, 2005), 361-371.

³⁵ Julie Bosman, “Obama Sharply Assails Absent Black Fathers” *New York Times*, 16 June 2008, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/16/us/politics/15cnd-obama.html> In his 2004 DNC address, Obama said “Go into any inner-city neighbourhood..., and folks will tell you that government alone can’t teach kids to learn. They know that parents have to teach, that children can’t achieve unless we raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white.”

³⁶ In the same way that post-modern approaches dismiss broad social interpretations as “meta narratives”, a post-racial outlook might be understood as rejecting overarching social narratives of race, instead locating race in specific inter-personal relationships. From this perspective political or collective responses to race would be rejected and substituted by the regulation of behaviour. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), chapter 1.

³⁷ Hua Hsu, “The End of White America?”, *The Atlantic*, January/February 2009, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/01/the-end-of-white-america/7208/>

exhausted. To try to distance his campaign from the unpopular Bush presidency, attempt to harness a populist dynamic and ensure the turnout of more right-wing Republicans, McCain looked to the Alaskan Senator, Sarah Palin. This eleventh hour appointment was to provide a focus and legitimacy for a predominantly white disenchantment with America's problems later taking shape as the Tea Party. This response was vigorous, but, at the same time, narrow. Beyond taking up demands to reduce government and taxes there was little consensus and little ability to gain wider support.³⁸

However, not all Democrats were comfortable with the Obama strategy; many leading civil rights figures were initially sceptical. Democrat grandee Jesse Jackson was critical of Obama's avoidance of the "Jena 6" civil rights campaign, Reverend Al Sharpton questioned his ability to represent blacks, and the eminent academic Cornel West called for more to be made on racial issues.³⁹ More generally polls in late 2007 showed only half of African Americans thought Obama "shared their values".⁴⁰ Even Michelle Obama in April 2007 from within the campaign, frustrated at poll showings, was reportedly worried that its post-racial direction took them away from their initial political concerns.⁴¹ The discussion about Obama within civil rights circles tended to be about how black he was. This was understandable as, while he

³⁸ Even in its opposition to government expenditure there is confusion. See for example, Bob Cesca, "Keep Your Goddamn Government Hands Off My Medicare!", *The Huffington Post*, 5 August 2009, accessed 29 March 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-cesca/get-your-goddamn-governme_b_252326.html

³⁹ Charles P. Henry, "Toward a Multiracial Democracy: The Jackson and Obama Contributions" in Charles P. Henry, Robert L. Allen and Robert Chrisman (eds.) *The Obama Phenomenon: Toward a Multiracial Democracy* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 23

⁴⁰ Polls in December 2006/January 2007, as the Democratic candidates lined up, showed Clinton leading Obama 60% to 20% among blacks. By February Obama led Clinton 36% to 24%. Dan Balz and Jon Cohen, "Blacks Shift to Obama, Poll Finds", *Washington Post*, 28 February 2007, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/27/AR2007022701030.html>

⁴¹ Heilemann and Halperin, *Race of a Lifetime*, 111.

was an African American, his experience as a second generation immigrant was very different to that of the black communities in America's inner cities⁴² – this was not just a matter of background but of political outlook and trust. However, with no alternative candidate on the horizon, support for Obama's campaign increased and as time went on the list of those giving a positive endorsement grew, often based on the symbolism of a black man in the White House. There was some desperation at work here. Despite the success of the civil rights movement in removing formal legal discrimination, subsequently the accomplishments of civil rights campaigners have been limited and the inferior position of blacks remains. Programmes that might step into the realms of social democracy to address black problems – or perhaps, as some have argued, to dismantle entrenched white networks⁴³ – have failed to find favour and affirmative action measures have been rolled back. The limits of formal equality have become clear, but so too the difficulty in going beyond this.⁴⁴ Further, the fracturing of the black community with a black middle class out of touch with the concerns of others has undermined black leadership and the role it previously played

⁴² Clarence Page has brought to attention the “model minority” status of recent African immigrants, at least when it comes to education, and their relationship to Ivy League affirmative action programmes. Obama as a second generation immigrant partly fits this model. Clarence Page, “Black Immigrants, An Invisible ‘Model Minority’”, *realclearpolitics.com*, 19 March 2007, accessed 29 March 2011, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2007/03/black_immigrants_an_invisible.html

⁴³ Scholars in the early whiteness school such as David Roediger contend that to end racism the “wages of whiteness” – i.e. benefits white workers receive both materially and psychologically – must be tackled. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1999).

⁴⁴ The present author discusses this further in Mark Beachill, “The Private Public”, Proof Set 2, Politics, Postmodern Journalism, and the Public (London: Proof-Reading.org, September 2010), accessed 29 March 2015, <http://www.proof-reading.org/the-private-public>

in liberal/left politics.⁴⁵ As the election drew closer civil rights activists gave the Obama ticket positive support, with isolated exceptions.⁴⁶

Outside of the issues raised in the campaign, the ability to organise online played an important role in creating a newly dynamic public arena. This was seen by many commentators as at least in part an explanation in itself of the vitality of the campaign. Online campaigning harnessed spontaneous support and provided an inexpensive direct channel to voters. The Obama campaign sent a billion emails and recruited 1.5 million volunteers with varying levels of involvement as well as raising a huge amount of money. David Plouffe, the campaign manager, described the 13 million email addresses they accumulated as the equivalent of having their own TV station.⁴⁷ Obama's online activities were noted as being particularly sophisticated and learnt and borrowed from the pioneering 2004 campaign of the unsuccessful Democratic candidate Howard Dean. The Obama campaign's focus on the Iowa caucus and early voting built up momentum and was at least partly facilitated by appeals to those sympathetic to the campaign online. Online support for Obama took on a life of its own – some of this was deliberate – the online systems encouraged informal contact to be recorded (called n2n or neighbour to neighbour campaigning) and let people setup local events to attend. However, outside of the official online campaign, spontaneous support could gather; for example, user generated content on YouTube generated 1,800 campaign-related videos and 14 million hours of

⁴⁵ Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2009), xxix, 128-129.

⁴⁶ For a taste of why there were so few, see Newby's attacks on those critical of Obama. Robert Newby, "The 'New Majority' Defeats White Nationalism? Assessing Issues of Race and Class in the Obama Presidency", *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2010), 380-383.

⁴⁷ Kenski et al, "The Obama Victory", 305, 307.

viewing.⁴⁸ Such online support meant that traditional Democratic campaigning and mobilisation was often side-stepped. The amount of money and volunteers generated caught both Obama and his opponents by surprise.

An important rationale for this research is how an understanding of race might help us account for the re-energizing of the public sphere. This was an election that deviated from those of the last few decades in its engagement with young people and ability to draw wider public involvement. There has been a tendency to assume as given the exuberance of public response, or “Obama-mania”, without attempting to explain or else situate it and draw out its meaning. The influential *Right Nation* thesis, that the USA is essentially a conservative nation,⁴⁹ has been brought into question through the campaign especially for younger cohorts of the electorate. The “silent majority” given voice by Nixon to support establishment politics and morphing into the white blue-collar base of the Reagan years seems to have been undermined, yet it is unclear whether seeing this as a liberal triumph is appropriate. The powerful appeal of post-racial politics suggests the conservative-liberal dichotomy may not be the best framework to understand what happened.

There remain very real racial divisions in the USA. It is worth noting just how great the divisions are between black and white America. This is a necessary reminder as the discussion about race does not address these divisions to the extent that it might seem they no longer exist. One author, Brooks, usefully brings together and catalogues many of these divisions as they existed as of 2005 and how little they have changed since the beginning of the post-civil rights/affirmative action era in the

⁴⁸Zack Stiegler and Mary Beth Leidman, “Then and Now: A Content Analysis of Media Used in the Presidential Election Campaigns of Kennedy and Obama”, *Sociology Study*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2011): 7.

⁴⁹ Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *The Right Nation*.

substantial appendix to his book. The appendix looks at figures since 1973 until 2005. As Brooks notes “Demographics in the appendix regarding housing, high school dropout rates, business ownership, and other areas of American life all show significant racial disparities in resources for the entire post-civil rights period despite scores of black success stories during this time.”⁵⁰ To give a flavour of these divisions as of 2005: 21 per cent of black families were living below the poverty line as against 6 per cent of non-Hispanic white families. The median family income of whites was \$63,000. That of blacks was \$37,000. The average earnings for young black males with an undergraduate degree was \$45,000 in comparison to \$65,000 for whites.⁵¹ Young black men were seven times more likely to go to prison than young white men. Young black men were only half as likely to earn a bachelor’s degree as young white men.⁵² In earnings, access to resources, assets, educational achievement and in dealings with the law there clearly remains a huge gap between black and white America. Notably looking at the numbers from 1973 there has been little or no relative improvement. Several measures indicate that the disparities have grown. Another source worth referencing is from the Urban League, an organisation for black advancement. It publishes an annual report on the “State of Black America”. In the 2008 edition on unemployment, it notes that the unemployment rate for blacks was 12 per cent as compared to 5.8 per cent for whites. It also notes, for example, “The median net worth of White households in the study grew to \$265,000

⁵⁰ Roy L. Brooks, *Racial Justice in the Age of Obama* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), xxi

⁵¹ Ibid. xii. It should be noted that while this is taken as evidence of straightforward comparative racism in some of the literature that different degrees come with different earning potential. It is quite possible that this is the result of taking different degrees and might be related to a low take-up of STEM subjects by black male undergraduates, for example.

⁵² Ibid. xii, xiii

over the 25-year period [up to 2008] compared with just \$28,500 for the Black households.”⁵³

And yet despite these divisions the Obama victory seemed to allow race as an issue to be excised from national politics: the *Wall Street Journal* felt comfortable in arguing the USA was now in a position to “put to rest the myth of racism as a barrier to achievement in this splendid country” and likewise dismiss “European condescension about ‘racist’ America”.⁵⁴ The hope, expressed succinctly by Obama volunteers was “Race Doesn’t Matter!”,⁵⁵ yet paradoxically in the 2008 election the desire to transcend race did.

⁵³ Askia Muhammad, “State of Black America”, *The Final Call*, 8 April 2014 Available at: http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/National_News_2/article_101351.shtml With Obama’s presidency and with the crash of 2008 it has been noted that the assets of blacks in particular have been hit particularly hard through the subprime mortgage crash. David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (London: Verso: 2008), 228-229

⁵⁴ Editorial, “President-Elect Obama: The Voters Rebuke Republicans for Economic Failure”, *Wall Street Journal*, 5 November 2008, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122586244657800863.html>

⁵⁵ Manning Marable, “Introduction: Racializing Obama”, 5. This was also reported at the South Carolina primary, see Katharine Q. Seelye, “Live From South Carolina, the Democratic Primary”, *New York Times Caucus Blog*, 26 January 2008, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/26/live-from-south-carolina-the-democratic-primary/>

Chapter 2. A New Hope?

This chapter predominantly works through an analysis of primary material in the form of the transcripts of the televised debates for both the Democratic nomination and the general election. It was through these debates and in the heat of argument that the discussion of change, in particular, took on its clearest form. It also uses journalistic coverage of the use of change and hope which was supplemented by detailed journalistic accounts of the campaign in book form. These came out shortly after the election and were written by journalists who followed the campaign trail and who were given near insider access to the personalities of the campaign.¹ The chapter also used some of the discussion of “post”, e.g. post-modern and post-feminist in journal articles where authors attempted to understand why this designation had become popular.

One academic analysis called change “the theme that defined the 2008 race”.² This chapter looks at the ideas of change and of hope that seemed to play such an important part in the election. The slogans of “change” and of “hope” seemed to capture the public imagination and even took on a life of their own outside the campaign with iconic posters, t-shirts and memorabilia stamped with alternately one or the other.

In 2010, Sarah Palin speaking at the first ever Tea Party National Convention rhetorically asked Obama supporters “How’s that hopey, changey stuff working out?”³ Palin was raising the lack of transparency of the Obama administration in

¹ Wolfe, *Codename: Renegade*; Heilemann and Halperin. *Race of a Lifetime*

² James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, Jr., *Epic Journey: The 2008 Elections and American Politics* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 17.

³ Don Gonyea, “‘How’s That Hopey, Changey Stuff?’ Palin Asks”, npr.org, 7 February 2010, accessed 1 April 2015, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123462728>

comparison with its professed idealism. However, the “hopey changey stuff” has caught on as summing up the lack of content behind Obama’s campaign. Veteran anarchist and campaigner Noam Chomsky, asked in 2012 to reflect on the Obama administration, picked up on Palin’s meme: “when she was making fun of this ‘hopey-changey’ stuff – she was right. There was nothing there... [I]t’s no great secret that the U.S. electoral system is mainly public relations extravaganzas. They keep away from issues. It’s sort of a marketing affair”.⁴ Chomsky may be something of a political outlier, but the question of how ideas such as hope or change became seemingly so powerful has to be answered. A close reading of the ideas, especially in the context of the election campaign, shows that there was something there. As we will argue, voters were not simply mesmerized by empty marketing glitz.

It should be noted that calls for “change” have scant novelty in presidential elections. In a simple sense any challenger to the incumbent president, even those from the same party, is calling for change of some description. However, it is not given that the calls for change should be take the shape of this lowest common denominator (“we need change”) rather than becoming a call for more specific proposals such as a “war on poverty”, “a chicken in every pot”, “supporting the middle class” etc. Nonetheless calling for change has become common in the post-war period. Among many recent examples of the use of change as an important appeal in presidential elections are: Thomas Dewey, the Republican challenger to President Harry S. Truman in 1948 using the slogan “America needs a change”; Jimmy Carter in 1976 used “A leader, for a change”; Walter Mondale’s 1984 campaign used “Time for a Change”. In 1992, one of Bill Clinton’s key slogans was “It’s Time to Change

⁴ Amy Goodman, “Chomsky: Occupy Wall Street ‘Has Created Something That Didn’t Really Exist’ in U.S. — Solidarity”, [democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org), 14 May 2012, accessed 1 April 2015, http://www.democracynow.org/2012/5/14/chomsky_occupy_wall_street_has_created

America". Even George W. Bush running as an incumbent in 2004 gave a nod towards the idea by appealing to "Steady leadership in times of change" – not unreasonably suggesting that change today is a given. Indeed using change in a contemporary campaign is made difficult by having to finding a relatively original formulation. "Change" is a well-worn cliché in elections; the idea that the success of Obama's appeal resides merely in appealing to "change" can be discounted.

The specific form the Obama campaign used "change" was as the slogan "change you can believe in". This was used consistently for 19 months from the primaries until late in the general election. "Change you can believe in" on its own can be interpreted in several ways. However, the slogan should be understood by considering the problems faced by the Obama camp and the strategy to tackle these problems. The initial difficulty was how to deal with the relative inexperience of the candidate in comparison with Obama's competitors for the Democratic nomination and later to potentially take on a veteran Republican candidate. The discussion of the need to have an experienced leader has been a staple of recent presidential contests and inexperience would be seen to be a liability. Further, a specific problem identified for the electability of black candidates was that it had been possible for white voters to dismiss them on the basis that they lacked experience or were otherwise deficient in leadership skills and so the charge of inexperience allowed perhaps an expression of coded racism or at minimum of racial distrust.⁵

The Obama camp's strategy was to try to use the fact that its opponents were politically experienced heavyweights to their own advantage. In a judo-like approach, the attempt would be made to try to use their opponents' own weight against them

⁵ Micah W. Kubic, "Ideology, Race-Specificity, and Racism: Impacts on Black Presidential Candidacies", March 2008, 8-9.

and so bring them down. The argument was made that political gravitas tied up with Washington meant at the very least that their opponents were not best placed to bring change or at worst incapable of bringing change. The Obama camp's message was that the change people wanted could not come from a political insider. The stress was that political experience could easily be a problematic rather than a useful resource. The experience of working in the nation's capital was recast as part of the problem, with the idea of Beltway insiders divorced from the concerns on Main Street and the middle class, and more attendant to lobbyists and special interests. The proving ground for "change you can believe in" was in the Democratic primaries. To win Obama had to be able to take on the favourite Hillary Clinton, a politician with a long track record and linked to the previous Democrat victory of her husband. Although not without detractors, Clinton's initial polling support in early 2007 for the Democrat nomination stood at 40% as against Obama's 21% reflecting Clinton's strong reputation.⁶ But, as one Obama strategist was wont to say, Clinton would be made to "pay" for her experience.⁷

The idea of "change you can believe in" takes on a particular cast when applied in the context of the Obama camp's strategy. The suggestion is not being made that the particular policies being put forward by the candidate are especially believable, rather the emphasis here is very much that it is not possible to believe in change as espoused by political opponents because of their insider status. The positive statement, when seen in context, represents a negative view of opponents. If an attack on experience earned in Washington politics had been the sole province of the Obama campaign then it might easily have been dismissed as a self-serving

⁶ Frank Newport et al. *Winning the White House 2008: The Gallup Poll, Public Opinion and the Presidency* (Infobase: New York, 2009), xvii; In October 2007 one poll saw a 53% Clinton / 20% Obama split. John Heilemann and Mark Halperin, *Race of a Lifetime* (London: Penguin, 2010), 99.

⁷ Heilemann and Halperin, *Race of a Lifetime*, 119.

attempt to distract from the candidate's own lack of experience. However, the refrain that there was something fundamentally wrong – even dysfunctional – with US federal government and that congressmen and congresswomen were putting “special interests” before the nation was a constant political refrain from all sides. A series of terms – gridlock, pork barrel politics, slush money, lobbying, corruption – had joined the lexicon in on-going refrains about the US political setup. Such is public disaffection that one famous early 2013 poll of registered voters showed them more favourably disposed towards cockroaches than to Congress.⁸

In the Democratic nomination campaign the argument that only an outsider could bring change became insistent. In the face of poor polling figures in October 2007, the Obama team's approach became to oppose the idea that the Clinton camp might itself legitimately use change. David Axelrod, Obama's chief strategist presented a memo to re-focus the troops: Clinton was to be painted as part of the Washington status quo, as the epitome of what the US public detested about federal politics.⁹ Despite this taking of stock, it was not Obama that most strongly claimed Clinton was in the pockets of the lobbyists but another candidate, John Edwards. Edwards was long considered as one of the potential victors alongside Clinton and Obama. His strategy was similar to Obama's, that is to target Clinton as having links with special interests. The strength of Edwards' attacks on Clinton gave the sense of how strongly his anti-Hillary position was held and at one stage he even had overtures made to the Obama team – which were rejected – of a mutual pact against Clinton.

⁸ Asked “What do you have a higher opinion of Congress or cockroaches?”, 43 per cent said Congress and 45 per cent cockroaches, with 12 per cent not sure. Public Policy Polling, “Press Release: Congress Less Popular than Cockroaches, Traffic Jams”, 8 January 2013, accessed 14 January 2015, http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/pdf/2011/PPP_Release_Natl_010813_.pdf

⁹ Heilemann and Halperin, *Race of a Lifetime*, 119

The first Democratic debate on 30 October 2007 saw Edwards launch scalding attacks on Clinton:

I think it is crucial for Democratic voters and caucus-goers to determine who they can trust, who's honest, who is sincere, who has integrity. And I think it's fair in that regard to look at what people have said. Senator Clinton says that she believes she can be the candidate for change, but she defends a broken system that's corrupt in Washington, D.C.

One participant considered Edwards to have made “pretty close to personal attacks”.¹⁰ Edwards, for his part, seemed not to understand why Obama had not backed up his strategy; according to one account during the first interval he “pulled Obama aside and stared him in the eyes. ‘Barack, you need to focus!’ Edwards implored. ‘Focus! Focus! Focus!’”.¹¹ Obama then joined the attack. He argued that Clinton’s lack of transparency over conversations with her husband when president meant that she would not be able to renew trust in government and that her experience was tied up with a system dominated by special interests, pork barrel spending and “bungling money” that had alienated the US public. Further, he argued Republicans were fixated on Clinton because they were familiar with and so “very comfortable” with the partisan “bickering” that had brought legislative gridlock for much of the past eight years. Following Obama, Edwards then argued that Clinton had raised more money from lobbyists, big business and the defence industry than any candidate, Democrat or Republican, and so was just not going to break their grip: “Will she be the person who brings about the change in this country? You know, I believe in Santa Claus. I believe in the tooth fairy. But I don’t think that’s going to

¹⁰ MSNBC, “Oct. 30 Democratic Debate Transcript”, 31 October 2007, accessed 8 December 2014, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21528787/ns/politics-the_debates/t/oct-democratic-debate-transcript/

¹¹ Heilemann and Halperin, *Race of a Lifetime*, 146.

happen. I really don't." The attacks by Edwards and the follow-up by Obama seemed to set the tone for the debate; the six male candidates spent much of their time attacking Clinton. All would have to, at some stage, state their case against the leading contender. It seemed the green light had been given. As a result Clinton seemed on the defensive and did not help her cause by seeming to give conflicting answers on the question of driving licenses for illegal immigrants. The Clinton camp reacted that their candidate had been picked on. They released a YouTube video called "The Politics of Pile-on". The media took this as being a complaint that six men had been picking on a single woman. Whether the Clinton camp chose to let this interpretation go and see where it led is unclear, but nonetheless the result was seen to be another Clinton gaffe of trying to avoid the cut and thrust of debate and so draw attention away from her mistake.

The pattern was set where Obama relied on Edwards' strong attacks on Clinton that fit with his own campaign's strategy. Obama could then make points less stridently than otherwise necessary and could avoid either seeming overly aggressive or often even being seen as explicitly negative towards Clinton. In effect Edwards played the role of a "stalking horse" for the Obama campaign. The 5 January 2008 Democratic nomination debate showed just how powerful the charge of being part of the existing system had become. Edwards, still in the race, argued that Clinton was part of "the forces of status quo" and in hock to a system dominated by "entrenched special interests". Even after 20 Democratic debates Clinton seemed on the defensive even taken aback by the attacks. Her argument was that she too wanted change after the Bush presidency. She responded – although not directly to the argument – that "making change is not about what you believe. It's not about a speech you make. It is about working hard". Acknowledging that Clinton had said she would tackle special

interests, in a more subtle attack than that of Edwards, Obama noted that he was pleased that Hillary was finally talking about the subject, the sarcasm implied, but that he had long been involved in creating legislation to bring lobbying into the open. Still in contention (just) and so formally in the debate albeit playing little active role, the 14-year veteran of Congress, Bill Richardson was moved to ask, “Is experience kind of a leper?”¹² The answer clearly, it was. And although there was the occasional rhetorical concession that experience is necessary and part of the on-going discussion of candidates was about their track-record and the relevant qualities of leadership, the terms of the debate had been set by the argument that exposure to Washington was toxic.

The Obama campaign, then, benefited from and played up to a cynicism about politics as was. The charges being forcefully aired were of corruption or rotteness in the system or at least by participants in it. It was not a simple disagreement over policy. These concerns were not the sole province of the Obama campaign. Other Democrats played to the same negative perceptions about politics. However, the Obama team were the main beneficiaries in effectively turning inexperience into an asset. The charge of having Washington experience and being “old politics” and thus being incapable of bringing change became an effective stick to beat the Clinton campaign. As the nomination contest developed the idea that Clinton could bring change was dismissed. It seemed to be that Obama and his team came to believe that change was their exclusive commodity: the change *they* could believe in. Increasingly Obama’s support from volunteers and the millions he was able to raise

¹² Patrick Healy and Jeff Zeleny, “At Debate Two Rivals Go After Defiant Clinton”, *New York Times*, 6 January 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/06/us/politics/06dems.html?_r=0; New York Times Website, “Transcript: The Democratic Debate in New Hampshire”, 5 January 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/05/us/politics/05text-ddebate.html?fta=y&pagewanted=all>

from small donations online gave support to the idea that he was at a distance from the old politics. In effect a virtuous circle had been established where the argument that he might move past corrupt Washington politics was bolstered by the number of donations and volunteers; these donations and volunteers themselves validated the argument and encouraged more of the same.

Throughout the campaign the Clinton camp tried to use the theme of change itself but with little sustained success. Despite the array of political talent associated with the campaign it initially used the stilted formulation, “Working for change. Working for you.” Subsequently the slogans were changed several times: “the strength and experience to make change happen”, “ready for change, ready to lead” and “the change we need”. The attempted use and rapid disposal of these ideas indicated the difficulty the campaign had identifying a message that worked.¹³ The Obama campaign’s increasing ownership of change made it difficult for the Clinton campaign to even use the term. One Clinton strategist, in retrospect, rued the decision not to raise money via small donations online that might have linked Clinton to grassroots support. It was apparently rejected because it seemed like too little money and otherwise trying to make something of the gender issue.¹⁴

We have stressed the specific use of change against political experience, but the objection could be made that change as taken up and adopted by the public seemed a somewhat loftier affair. The sense was that Obama had a rhetorical flair that promised change – as something of a higher purpose. Clinton in the January 2008 debate was sufficiently worried by Obama’s mastery of change in his speeches to object *twice* that he had change only as “words”. Clinton felt better taking a swipe at

¹³ Ben Smith, “Undecided: Hillary Keeps Shifting Slogans”, *Politico*, 3 January 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0108/7685.html>

¹⁴ David Remnick, *The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama* (London: Picador, 2010), 515.

the excessive rhetorical talent that seemed to promise perhaps too much rather than attempting to explain her problematic Washington credentials. The expansive sense of change taken up so positively by the public might seem at first incongruous with the political tactics discussed above. However, it is best not to see the two as merely co-existent but as complimentary. The soaring rhetoric of Obama invoking the best traditions of the US polity worked by contrast with the sordid money/vote grubbing attached to contemporary congress. Leith's analysis of the Obama's rhetorical skills shows how Obama evokes the glories of the past through his links with the rhetoric of both Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. In key passages Obama re-works and re-uses important historical speeches that would be familiar to his US audience. Rather than simply understanding such rhetoric as being about the political points being put forward, the high blown speeches are about "positioning him at the confluence of two great oratorical traditions in American public life".¹⁵ The attack on Washington-as-is complimented the rhetoric that harked back to Washington-as-was. By being able to connect with the past, some of the past glories could rub-off on Obama and might even be seen as qualities that are latent within the nation. At the same time the giants of history could be set against the pygmies inhabiting the capitol today. Change as seen in the rolling power of US history, as high minded and idealist, served to negatively highlight contemporary Washington, as small minded and calculating.

It is here that we can consider the use of "hope" in the election in how it connects with the idea of change. "Hope" like change is an idea that has been used before in US politics, but with a much smaller pedigree. Famously, in 1992, Bill Clinton used

¹⁵ Sam Leith, *You Talkin' to Me?: Rhetoric from Aristotle to Obama* (London, Profile Books: 2012), 218.

hope allegorically in a speech at the Democrat National Conference about hope for the future, even as hope for racial equality, through referencing the name of his home town, Hope, Arkansas.¹⁶ However, hope used as a political theme by Obama was largely his own creation, though inspired by a sermon “The Audacity to Hope” given by his pastor Jeremiah Wright in 1990.¹⁷ Obama used the title “The Audacity of Hope” for the 2004 DNC speech that shot him to fame and later for his second autobiography. In his 2004 speech, Obama argues that the Democrats are putting forward a “politics of hope” rather than a “politics of cynicism”. This hope, “God’s greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation; the belief in things not seen; the belief that there are better days ahead”:

It’s the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; the hope of a young naval lieutenant bravely patrolling the Mekong Delta; the hope of a millworker’s son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too.¹⁸

Here, Obama uses “hope” as a way to rhetorically connect the multiple experiences of the US across time. It uses the idea of a faith that one’s situation can be altered. This is makes for a heady blend in its association with the aspirations of the American dream, with the struggle against slavery that rent the nation, even giving a

¹⁶ William J. Clinton, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York”, The American Presidency Project, 16 July 1992, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25958>; William J. Clinton, “Clinton’s Journey the ‘The Man From Hope’”, The Living Room Candidate: Presidential Campaign Commercials 1952-2012, The Museum of the Moving Image Website, 1992, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1992/journey>

¹⁷ Jeremiah Wright, “The Audacity to Hope”, *Preaching Today*, 1990, accessed 8 December 2014, reprinted here: <http://sweetness-light.com/archive/wrights-sermon-the-audacity-to-hope>

¹⁸ Barack Obama, “Transcript of a Speech by Barack Obama at the Democratic National Convention on 27 July 2004”, 27 July 2004, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.librarian.net/dnc/speeches/obama.txt>

nod to the youthful idealism sacrificed in Vietnam, all couched in language that sits easily within a strong tradition of religiosity. Further, the stress is that the speaker shares a personal and contemporary connection to this universal theme/tradition. Obama notes that this hope is not idealistic i.e. it is not merely being “hopeful” and so requires work. The link between “hope” and a political programme, though, is difficult to imagine because the idea is so general and amorphous. It is more an attempt to rework national mythology than any clear aspiration. The main implication that might be drawn is to remain true to the nation which had seen the meeting of aspirations over such a long time. Although from another perspective it might equally be said that many of the individuals he alluded to were struggling *against* the US political setup. In other words, the “can do” spirit is continuously needed to tackle systemic problems in institutions that intimate and say outright: “you can’t”. There is a deft recasting of national deficiencies as national justification or of translating the qualities of individuals into qualities of the nation. The uplifting power of hope, as with change, is the link to the political capital of the past. With hope Obama restated the American dream in a slightly more religious form and connects it to a broader range of struggles than those of impoverished immigrants arriving at Ellis Island. This is quite an achievement – although perhaps it is also not perhaps so easily used by others linked in part as it is to the colour of the candidate’s skin.

Another part of Obama’s approach where the high value of US politics in the abstract or historical sense was contrasted with a low value given to US politics today was in relationship to the partisan divisions in US politics. One of Obama’s most celebrated speeches made at the 2004 DNC and which launched him to national prominence serves to illustrate that there is a sense of looking down on today’s politics. Famously Obama argued there were not red states or blue states but only the United

States. While raising the US polity in the abstract, this is also in a sense a decrying of the political disagreements there are today. There is an overture to the politically disconnected electorate, frustrated by foolish political disagreements, by the legislative logjam and that just wants problems to be solved. Thus strongly held convictions competing in the public square are, as previously noted, called “bickering” by Obama. Rather than explain where his party stands on these disagreements Obama chose to be dismissive. And with no explanation of the divisions, then supposedly such politics – aka partisanship – could only be venal and self-serving.

Indeed Obama’s position above politics made it difficult for Clinton. Attacks by her did not seem to stick, whereas attacks by Obama on Clinton seemed to be believed. The explanation doing the rounds at one point was that Obama had charisma, was very likeable, and Clinton was as Obama put it, “likeable enough”.¹⁹ However, it might be better to consider that even at an early stage many Democrats had invested themselves in Obama’s saint-like position.

Many took from the powerful rhetoric that Obama brought to the race that the change being discussed was surely akin to that being discussed by Martin Luther King, Jr.²⁰ However, the complimentary point which gave such links with the past their salience owed as much to Ross Perot, the billionaire who ran as an independent for president in 1992 and 1996 on a ticket of going to Washington to “clean out the barn”.

If targeting political experience as being problematic worked with Clinton, the approach could plausibly be extended to McCain. “Change you can believe in” was

¹⁹ Richard Cohen, “You’re Likable Enough’ Costs Obama”, Real Clear Politics, 10 January 2008, accessed 8 December 2014,

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/01/youre_likable_enough_costs_oba.html

²⁰ Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me?*, 185-192.

carried over into the general election contest. Again Obama's ownership of "change" limited the scope of the McCain team to manoeuvre. In the face of this McCain's team struggled with a coherent presentation moving from the idea of being a seasoned political operator to being a political maverick – in Washington but not of Washington. The way in which the Obama team had laid claim to important ideas in the campaign and its symbolic dominance became clear in early June 2008 when the troubled McCain campaign sought to appropriate some of the Obama campaign's "brand capital". The slogan "A leader you can believe in" made its appearance at a McCain Louisiana rally playing on the Obama slogan and attempting to stress McCain's leadership credentials. The slogan tried to co-opt part of the Obama message and so too did the McCain website, to the extent that, incredibly, it was rebranded in the colours of the Obama campaign and with a strikingly similar logo – the slogan "A leader we can believe in" now prominently displayed.²¹

It was, however, insufficient for McCain to co-opt merely the second half of the "change you can believe in" slogan. On 4 September 2008 while accepting the party's nomination the McCain/Palin ticket signalled that it sought to challenge where Obama was seen to dominate and its claim to the idea of change itself.²² With the economy collapsing a campaign strategy projecting more of the same was increasingly unrealistic and so McCain adopted the slogan "Change is coming" and avoided mentioning the incumbent Republican president. In his 13 September radio

²¹ Sam Stein, "McCain Rips Off Obama's Slogan and Logo", *Huffington Post*, 8 June 2010 [article misdated], accessed 8 December 2014,

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/06/04/mccain-rips-off-obamas-slogan-105266.html>

²² John McCain, "McCain's Nomination Acceptance Speech at the Republican National Convention", Council on Foreign Relations, 4 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/us-election-2008/mccains-nomination-acceptance-speech-republican-national-convention/p17100>

Julia Hoppock, "Obama's 'Change' Slogan Gets a Change", *ABC News*, 13 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2008/09/obamas-change-s/>

address McCain went further by claiming co-ownership of the Obama campaign's slogan and that he could firm up its promise of change: "We offer not only change you can believe in, but change you can verify."²³

McCain's declaration that he could offer "change you can believe in" was not merely bluster or assertion however. Sara Palin's addition to the Republican ticket on 4 September 2008 allowed him to co-opt this "change". The Obama campaign could no longer rely on the argument that only they could bring change based on being not of Washington. Sara Palin's lack of experience and location out in Alaska could allow her to argue that she too, like Obama, was a Washington outsider. The Obama campaign had relied on emphasising that their candidate's inexperience was an asset because it set him outside the Washington machine. A great deal of Obama's formal claim to be an "agent of change" had relied solely on the anti-political sentiment that an "outsider" untainted by deep association with the status quo might reconfigure a dysfunctional politics. Palin was even able to effectively criticise Obama's running mate Joe Biden as a creature of Washington and thus bring into question Obama's change credentials.²⁴ In particular Palin could employ some of the homeliness of President Bush Jr. by way of contrast with Obama's east coast liberal intellectualism (though by way of Hawaii). The challenge set by the McCain/Palin pairing was via the *adoption* of the arguments on change rather than *opposition* to the points being put forward by the Obama campaign.

²³ John McCain, "John McCain's September 13 Radio Address", *Real Clear Politics*, 13 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014,

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/09/john_mccains_september_13_radi.html

²⁴ Elisabeth Bumiller, "Palin Hits 'Change' Theme and Criticizes Biden", *New York Times Caucus Blog*, 6 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014,

<http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/09/06/palin-hits-change-theme-and-criticizes-biden/>

In passing, it should be noted that the Tea Party, which was given such impetus by the Palin nomination, has in some ways a similar orientation to politics and history as that of the Obama campaign. Likewise, the Tea Party combines hostility towards the political system today with a reverence to political tradition. And, while Tea Party groupings were given legitimacy by Palin's nomination, reciprocally their support of Palin as grass roots anti-Washington activists only enhanced her "change" credentials in the sense that change came to be used here. "Change" becomes something abstracted from political policies, even of political views. There seems to be a cynicism at the heart of this idealism; at least an idealism about the past – and perhaps the future – growing around a core of cynicism about the present.

The ability of the McCain/Palin ticket to take up the theme of change seemed to confuse the Obama campaign. "Simply saying the word does not make you the agent of change," complained Axelrod.²⁵ Obama opined incoherently, "We can't be fooled because John McCain – I've been talking about change since we started this campaign – some of you were involved. I talked about change when we were up, I talked about change when we were down."²⁶ The reporter for *Esquire* argued that the questioning of the ownership of change threw Obama:

Truth be told, Obama himself seems to have lost his clarity, lost his hold on change. Blindsided by McCain and Palin and their absurd claims of Change is Coming and Change You Can Verify, Obama wears the slightly

²⁵ Jeff Zeleny, "Obama in Pennsylvania", New York Times Caucus Blog, 5 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/09/05/obama-in-pennsylvania/>

²⁶ Julia Hoppock, "Obama's 'Change' Slogan Gets a Change", *ABC News*, 13 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2008/09/obamas-change-s/>

uncomprehending look of someone who's just discovered that his wallet has been lifted at a Fourth of July picnic.²⁷

McCain seemed to have a much better grasp of change, "For Governor Palin and me, change is more than a slogan, and it's not about party. It's about changing the way business is done, and it's the reason we entered politics to begin with." In the first presidential debate McCain, while in bi-partisan agreement with Obama on the financial recovery plan, smoothly introduced the idea that "ear-marked", pork-barrel spending was the "gateway drug" to political corruption that he had in particular fought and that Obama had been complicit with this in his state until he declared his presidential candidacy.²⁸ How convincing McCain's "change" conversion might be and how it might lie alongside the inspirational side of change employed by Obama proved a different matter. But even there, in the second debate, McCain bizarrely started to encroach on Obama's territory: "My mother basically raised my family... I know what it's like in dark times... I know what it's like to have to fight to keep one's hope going in tough times".²⁹

The co-option of change felt like a slight to the Obama campaign and its carefully constructed moral superiority. Obama was rankled that the ownership of the term change was being challenged, that McCain's strategy was as the *New York Times* put it to "seize the mantle of change"³⁰. "Let's be absolutely clear about what change

²⁷ Margaret Doris, "Letter from New Hampshire: Who Moved Barack Obama's Cheese?", *Esquire*, 15 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.esquire.com/the-side/feature/obama-in-nh-091508>

²⁸ C-Span, "C-SPAN: First 2008 Presidential Debate (Full Video)", 27 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-nNIEduEOw>

²⁹ C-Span, "C-SPAN: Second 2008 Presidential Debate (Full Video)", 8 October 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkBqLBsu-o4>

³⁰ Adam Nagourney and Michael Cooper, "McCain Vows to End 'Partisan Rancor'", *New York Times*, 4 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/05/us/politics/05repubs.html?pagewanted=all>

means – change isn't just a word", argued an exasperated Obama. And while Palin had jokingly described herself as a pitbull with lipstick a rattled Obama made the unstatesmanlike suggestion that the new challenger was rather a pig with lipstick.³¹ A *New York Times* reporter connected this to Obama's previous haughty reaction to Clinton's attempt to suggest that she might deliver change.³² Obama's call for civility and compromise in politics when tested seemed wanting.

Events, then, had overtaken "Change we can believe in". From September the campaign adopted "Change we need". The idea being that Obama will bring change that not only should you believe in, but it's "the change Americans need because of the state of their lives over the last 8 years under a Bush presidency".³³ The attempt was, in part at least, to recast "change" as new, *changed* policies. Obama's economic plan became the centrepiece of this re-justification. However, as Thomas Friedman, the *New York Times* commentator, argued, in this process Obama had managed to go from "cool to cold" and needed to be able to summon up some enthusiasm for his own policies³⁴ which were not particularly radical or ambitious.³⁵ It seemed that the "the hope monger had gone" at least in his all-out form, although a

³¹ Adam Nagourney, "Shades of Lipstick Tint a Race", *New York Times* Caucus Blog, 9 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/09/09/shades-of-lipstick-tint-a-race/>

³² Jeff Zeleny, "Déjà Vu on Change Argument", *New York Times* Caucus Blog, 8 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/09/08/deja-vu-on-change-argument/>

³³ Hoppock, "Obama's 'Change' Slogan Gets a Change".

³⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, "From the Gut", *New York Times*, 9 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/10/opinion/10friedman.html>

³⁵ Julie Bosman, "The Ad Campaign: No Attacks, Just an Economic Plan", *New York Times*, 17 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/18/us/politics/18oadbox.html>

vestige remained in that the new economic ads eschewed negativity even though they might seem anaemic.³⁶

The way that the “mantle of change” had so easily transferred from Democrat to Republican in this way – this instability – seems to show how insubstantial and shallow was the initial basis for the claim. There had been no substantial proposals put forward on removing “entrenched special interests” through political reform. Perhaps a programme of measures tied to a constitutional amendment might have been put forward in such a campaign. The policies put forward were either piecemeal and inadequate for the problems that were said to exist or else vague and diffuse. This seems to confirm Clinton’s point that holier-than-thou posturing was going on:

None of the problems we face will be easily solved. Now, I could stand up here and say let’s just get everybody together, let’s get unified....the sky will open, the light will come down celestial choirs will be singing, and everyone will know that we should do the right thing and the world will be perfect. Maybe I’m just lived a little long but I have no illusions about how hard this will be. You are not going to wave a magic wand and make the special interests disappear.³⁷

Although we have identified “change” as hostility to perceived political graft, perhaps there is something to be said the idea of change in a more general optimistic way. “Change” as a rallying cry can bring a simple, straightforward identification with the need to change without the electorate having to agree with *exactly* what the

³⁶ Carrie Budoff Brown, “On the Stump, Obama Moves Past Hope”, *Politico*, 15 September 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0908/13434.html>

³⁷ Eloise Harper cited in Tahman Bradley, “Clinton Pokes Fun at Obama Referencing Celestial Choirs”, *ABC News*, 24 February 2008, accessed 8 December 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2008/02/clinton-pokes-f/>

candidate had in mind. Perhaps for a country as large and diverse as the USA using the idea of change might be considered as important as part of reaching out and attempting to include as many sections of the electorate as possible. However, change in and of itself has little content and its use in political campaigning indicates difficulties in crafting a more substantial approach. In other areas of life, for example in business or sport, someone suggesting change would immediately be asked what changes were being proposed. It seems that the call for change has become so much part of the political furniture that its use is little commented on. The sharp minds engaged in political jousting find it difficult to call out the lack of content in the idea of change because their candidates or parties have adopted it at one stage or another.

In this case, the use of change was particularly problematic because of its several meanings – as opposition to graft, as the aspiration for a better world and as at least moderately different policies – obscured rather than clarified. Confusion reigned and both the media and the parties were guilty of playing to a dumbed-down narrative such as the abstract, often meaningless, discussion of leadership vs. change. The satirical animated series *South Park* sensing the emperor had no clothes and playing on the euphoria of the Obama campaign aired an episode the day after the election, “About Last Night...”, where with victory Democrat supporters milled around mindlessly shouting “Change!”³⁸

Despite the long campaign there was little or no testing of the main aspect of the idea of “change you can believe in”. Opponents of Obama were either defensive, accepting the points but trying to side-step them, as with Clinton, or else in agreement as with Edwards, McCain and Palin. It seemed that there was little

³⁸ South Park, “About Last Night...”, 12:12, 5 November 2008.

willingness to mount some sort of defence of politics in Washington in the face of public hostility. Perhaps it might have been argued that special interests had a legitimate interest in policy because policies were aimed at them and that they might bring expertise and a novel perspective to bear on the formation of policy. Likewise it might be argued that state money was required to attract large corporations which might otherwise decamp to foreign shores. And while the partisan rancour might sometimes be seen as being about petty differences, issues of principle were often at play. Admonishing the participants to play nicely and bridge differences seems to be dismissive of the debate, the dialogue, that is needed and so, in the end, reinforces cynicism rather than showing a way forward. With no defence of today's politics being made available, those still interested in the subject are often reduced to retreating into a wonk-ish fascination with the details of policy.

The upsurge of enthusiasm and even idealism shown in the 2008 election was intoxicating for many. However, its reliance on the narratives of the past was disturbing and ultimately self-limiting. While there might be inspiration to be had from the giants of US history, change to be meaningful must come from attempting to meet the needs of the present ultimately through new ideas and approaches.

There was no attempt to build political capital by defending contemporary political practice or by developing new practices – other than the candidates narrowly defending their own records in contrast with that seen around them. In the absence of a defence of contemporary political capital, the past was plundered. Obama's sophistication was that this was not merely by the appropriation of the stars and stripes but a clever re-working of national themes which proved inspiring to millions. However, the public in adopting such general ideas of change and hope so enthusiastically suggests a suspension of disbelief by the electorate itself and we

must allow for other factors such as race to have played to people's aspirations. The turbo charged version of "change" – energised by the rhetorical link to a golden age of politics on the one hand and tied to the distrust of contemporary politics on the other – retains the amorphous appeal that allows the audience to project (other) desires onto it. The quality of debate was insufficient to interrogate the idea of change or the anti-political sentiment attached to it.

Chapter 3. Online Activism and the Revival of Politics

The thesis has attempted to draw out how the 2008 election was connected to race. It seems clear that much of the novelty of the public response in the 2008 election was connected to racial issues and to the symbolism of electing black man to the White House. However, there has been another, partially competing, factor used to try to explain the relative dynamism and excitement of the campaign: online activism. During the 2008 presidential election, online campaigning was seen as reaching maturity and having had a substantial effect. This chapter examines the claims made for online campaigning and attempts to situate such campaigning within the context of changes to campaign strategy and to the politics of the Democratic Party in particular.

This chapter benefitted from the academic tendency to explore new phenomena – on the basis that results of such investigations will automatically bring new, i.e. original results. There is a wealth of investigations into the numbers of the online campaign in a number of academic journals and in several book length studies. The Obama online campaign was understood from an early stage to have followed on from the previous Howard Dean online campaign. This meant that there was already a large amount of attention in journal articles, journalistic interviews and several book length treatments that sought to develop the idea of the “netroots” that the thesis could make use of. The sheer volume and variety of online discussion made these the best sources to tackle this subject. A detailed study of the way in which online politics was conducted in the 2008 election was considered outside of the scope of the study, i.e. it would amount to a study in and of itself.

Primary sources were also used during research as a check on the assessments of secondary material. This involved looking through a number of online forums to assess whether the academic material captured what was happening online. In particular checks were made to ensure that there was no novel discussion of race taking place in such online forums. There was indeed no distinct online discussion of race found in these forums. In general the pattern of online forum discussion was a discussion which combined a strong “wonkish” element of attention to legislation with a locally/state oriented discussion of political characters and of the connections made with these characters and the main political candidates.

The majority view has been Obama’s ability to use the internet in his campaign enabled victory. One academic noted, “Most observers of the 2008 campaign agree that the Obama campaign’s use of the Internet was key to his success.”¹ And as staff writers on the *Pitt Political Review* argued:

The Internet has transformed from being almost insubstantial in political campaigns to being essential in only 10 years. The elections of 2008 and 2010 revolutionised the way that campaigns reach out to voters, with the new benchmark set by President Barack Obama and his campaign team in 2008.²

Howard Dean, whose online support while running for the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination had made many take notice, by 2007 came to see internet campaigning not simply as an important part of political campaigning but as a transformational phenomenon – as the way to return power to the people:

¹ Lynda Lee Kaid, “Changing and Staying the Same: Communication in Campaign 2008: Front Line Reports”, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2009): 419.

² Ankur Sakaria, Matthew Singer, and David Uhrmacher, “# 140ToWinIt”, *Pitt Political Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2012): 1.

The Internet is the most important tool for redemocratizing the world since Gutenberg invented the printing press. There's no way you could exaggerate the importance of the Internet, in terms of its ability to prevent the few people who seek to seize power and control everything from doing so.³

From this perspective the internet is acting as the mechanism where individuals outside of the traditional power elites can make their mark or at least plausibly re-enter the political arena from which they were previously alienated or excluded. For some this demonstrated a transition from a largely passive electorate of previous years, addressed by political advertisements in the mass media, towards the involvement of substantial numbers via the internet. This internet activation took many forms: self-directed research into political issues, getting involved in the election as volunteers, providing and raising funds, discussing the campaign with others through social networking, creating media such as online videos and acting as commentators through blogging. Potentially such activism might result in new political groupings, policy initiatives or whole new approaches to politics. The idea of the potential importance of people using IT was famously illustrated by *Time* magazine in 2006 whose cover featured a mirrored computer screen and which heralded "You" as the person of the year.⁴ In this reading the 2008 campaign might then be seen as the first campaign of the internet age; its precedents and importance perhaps as vital as any racial aspects of the campaign.

³ Mother Jones, "Interview with Howard Dean: Chairman of the Democratic National Committee", *Mother Jones*, 29 June 2007, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2007/06/interview-howard-dean-chairman-democratic-national-committee>

⁴ Lev Grossman, "You — Yes, You — Are TIME's Person of the Year", *Time*, 25 December 2006, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>; ABC had "bloggers" in general as the "people of the year" in 2004. Elizabeth Vargas, "People of the Year: Bloggers", ABC News website, 30 December 2004, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/PersonOfWeek/Story?id=372266&page=1>

In contrast to continued broad claims for the revolutionary, transformative power of the internet, recent academic work has sought to measure more closely the effect of online activities. Hindman, a scholar critical of claims for democratisation through the internet, notes that there is a “new wave of Internet scholarship that is no longer tied up in the unsatisfying debates of the 1990s.”⁵ Discussion and analysis in academia has started to move away from the dichotomy of the transformation of everything by the internet on the one hand and its dismissal as business as usual on the other, towards more detailed and nuanced readings of the development and impact of politics online.

The authoritative Pew survey of *The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008* supported the argument that the population in general had become more informed and more involved through online mechanisms, but provided qualification as to the scope of such changes. Overall the proportion of the population which had used the internet for political purposes in the campaign increased from 37 per cent of the population in 2004 to 46 per cent in the 2008 election. It showed that in the 2008 campaign, 24 per cent of those who had used the internet for political purposes posted, discussed or forwarded something about the election online or on a mobile phone – either on Facebook, Twitter, a blog, website, or in a text message etc. This number translates as 18 per cent of all adult internet users and about 13 per cent of the adult population. The self-reported dominant election news source remains television: 76 per cent described TV as one of their major sources of election news (they were able to select two) as against 26 per cent for the internet and 28 per cent for newspapers. Though notably these numbers do not reflect the extent to which online news

⁵ Matthew Hindman, Review of “The Future of the Internet and How to Stop It, by Jonathan Zittrain and Netroots: Online Progressives and the Transformation of American Politics, by Matthew R. Kerbel”, *Political Communication*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2010): 114.

sources are the online or mobile versions of mainstream media as is commonly the case.⁶

Strong claims of revolutionary transformation by the internet are also countered by academic sociological critiques of technological determinism (or of the media determinism associated with Marshall McLuhan). As one paper succinctly puts it, there is “a large body of work on the mutual shaping of technological, political, organizational, and cultural forms”.⁷ While being sceptical of claims that new technologies act as a *determining* factor for changes in campaigning, nonetheless technology should not be dismissed as merely symptomatic of other developments.⁸ Strategies, tactics and means of communication were developed and used to effect by interested parties in the 2008 election such that technology should be seen as one of the *determinants* in accounting for what happened. Paradoxically, it might be argued that notions of the transforming power of technology drove on efforts of people excited to be involved in the playing out of such change.

Two central connected themes inform the discussion of the impact of internet engagement: changes in the media landscape and in civic engagement. The political significance of the internet has been identified as relating to the undermining of existing media structures and the revival of democracy. Writing as long ago as 1994 Howard Rheingold discussed this as the capacity to “challenge the existing political

⁶ Aaron Smith, *The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008*, Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2009, accessed 1 June 2013, http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2009/The_Internets_Role_in_Campaign_2008.pdf, 3, 6, 40,42

⁷ Aaron Shaw and Yochai Benkler, “A Tale of Two Blogospheres Discursive Practices on the Left and Right”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (2012): 466.

⁸ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 1990), chapter 2.

hierarchy's monopoly on powerful communications media, and perhaps thus revitalize citizen-based democracy.”⁹

In the first theme the changes arising from the use of internet in politics are said to have played a disruptive role in the power and function of mainstream media. The traditional role of the media has been undermined or modified through online activity. This takes place through user-based selection and highlighting of material supplanting the editorial/journalistic process, through media content created directly by individuals, and by changes in patterns of communication that bypass traditional media in its function of shaping a public sphere. The “gatekeeper” role of mainstream media has, to an extent, been undermined by the presentation of journalistic material ordered through popularity – a process which has been called “gatewatching”¹⁰ – in aggregation sites, as lists of links, as social media postings, or when media content is said to have “gone viral”. Gatekeeping is an important concept in critiques of mainstream media where media agents are said to control what is reported as news and so filter content along ideologically or commercially informed lines. Many such critiques, for example the “propaganda model” of Chomsky and Herman¹¹, rely on the idea of gatekeeping by media corporations and so the diminution of this role and an “active-audience” acting as gatewatcher¹² are seen as potentially opening up media to alternative, previously excluded viewpoints and voices. For one writer, “Gatewatching technology which characterizes much of today’s UGC [user

⁹ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World* (London: Minerva, 1995), 14.

¹⁰ Axel Bruns, “Life Beyond the Public Sphere: Towards a Networked Model for Political Deliberation”, *Information Polity*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2008): 71-85.

¹¹ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002 [1995]).

¹² Ivan B. Dylko, Michael A. Beam, Kristen D. Landreville, and Nicholas Geidner, “Filtering 2008 US Presidential Election News on YouTube by Elites and Nonelites: An Examination of the Democratizing Potential of the Internet”, *New Media & Society*, Vol. 14, No. 5 (2012): 832.

generated content], allows non-elites for the first time, to act as an effective collaborative filter before news flows to a mass audience.”¹³

For some, however, content selected through popularity is seen as diminishing public debate overall because of the growth of “soft news” centring on entertainment, celebrity and the personal which crowds out attention that might be given to public issues. A comparison between content selected by popularity and that selected through the editorial process would suggest that journalists are more enamoured with hard news, i.e. news focused on straightforwardly public topics, than the readers of their material: approximately 20 per cent more soft news was highlighted when news was judged by popularity.¹⁴ One survey looking at the most viewed political news YouTube videos of the 2008 presidential election campaign suggested that gatewatching did not disrupt the presentation of elite voices to the extent that has been suggested. Over 80 per cent of these videos featured elites in their content and the creators of the content were over 70 per cent members of elite groups. However the people who posted the videos were two thirds from non-elites. This is perhaps partially due to the intellectual property issues that result from putting content onto YouTube.¹⁵

The second central theme of the effect of the internet on politics is the idea of the revival of democracy through online engagement. The large numbers of people taking part in presidential campaigns using internet based tools, for example, have led to a re-examination of discussions about the decline in US civic engagement. Robert Putnam’s seminal study, *Bowling Alone*, presented comprehensive research

¹³ Ibid., 838.

¹⁴ Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Limor Peer, “The Choice Gap: The Divergent Online News Preferences of Journalists and Consumers”, *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 61, No. 5 (2011): 857-876.

¹⁵ Dylko et al, “Filtering...”, 882.

that pointed to the decay of US civic life and civic institutions.¹⁶ Putnam argued in 2000 that the internet was unlikely to revive civic life because it was so often used for entertainment. Academic studies looking at the relationship between political participation and internet use, however, point to increased engagement. A meta-analysis of 38 studies of the relationship between political participation and internet use – looking at 116 different effects – shows a positive, though not overwhelming, correlation between internet use and political engagement; albeit with the caveat that the causality may be political interest affecting internet use.¹⁷ At a basic level Hayward argues online mechanisms, although not revolutionary, create new sustainable opportunities for democratic participation and are thus ultimately democratising.¹⁸ Hayward considers using the internet for independent political research and communication reduces barriers of time and resources for individuals looking to engage politically. Another of Putnam's key arguments, one that potentially brings into question whether the form of engagement online might reinvigorate civic life, is that the backbone of civic life is "bridging" social capital i.e. the connections between people of different backgrounds. The concern is that already weakened bridging social capital might be further reduced as people seek out only those that agreed with them online, a concern echoed by other commentators worried about a possible fragmentation and/or polarization of the public sphere.¹⁹ The Pew survey shows a mixed pattern: of those that used the

¹⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

¹⁷ Shelley Boulianne, "Does Internet Use Affect Engagement? A Meta-Analysis of Research", *Political Communication*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2009).

¹⁸ Allison R. Hayward, "Book Review: The Myth of Digital Democracy by Matthew Hindman", *George Mason University Law and Economics Research Paper Series*, 09-53, October 2009, accessed 16 April 2015,

http://www.law.gmu.edu/assets/files/publications/working_papers/0953BookReviewTheMyth.pdf

¹⁹ Andrew Calcutt and Phillip Hammond, *Journalism Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2011).

internet for politics during the 2008 election, 33 per cent of individuals “typically” sought out partisan voices of agreement; 21 per cent sought out content that might challenge their current views; and 25 per cent sought out neutral news sources.²⁰ However, perhaps rather than seeing civic activities as unitary it may be that there are elements of the past orthodoxies taking place at the same time as new types of motivation and engagement. One paper contrasts civic action and communication which is “dutiful” being replaced with one of “actualizing” – based on particular causes and consumer sensitivities. Here citizenship is changing with elements of both the “fragmentation of an old civic order” and new “emerging civic styles”.²¹

Networking

Political activism online was not solely a feature of the Obama campaign. However, it reached a new scale, importance, and sophistication with Obama’s use of the internet to organise activists and to raise funds. From the outset the goal was using online mobilisation to practical effect signalled by a series of local “community kick-off meetings”.²² Obama’s focus was that networking online should translate into campaigning activities, most often offline. This focus was a response to the difficulties experienced by the Howard Dean Democratic presidential campaign in 2003 in turning online support into an effective campaign tool. The problem of more tightly linking the field operations of the campaign with online volunteers was one the Dean campaign and associated technologists had worked on in the campaign and subsequently to the summer of 2003 when Dean dropped out of the presidential

²⁰ Smith, *The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008*, 70.

²¹ W. Lance Bennett, Chris Wells, and Deen Freelon, “Communicating Civic Engagement: Contrasting Models of Citizenship in the Youth Web Sphere”, *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 61, No. 5 (2011): 835.

²² Chris Cillizza, “Obama Campaign Aims to Turn Online Backers Into an Offline Force”, *Washington Post*, 31 March 2007, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/30/AR2007033001993.html>

race. When Obama's campaign began, much of the infrastructure and the practices for combining the two was available either in the form of consultancies, software companies such as Blue State Digital or in personnel. And, as Kreiss notes, Obama made use of these new socio-technical resources to a much greater extent than his rivals Edwards or Clinton.²³ One of Dean's software team hired by the Obama campaign, Franklin Hodge, explained how they had cemented the lessons of the Dean campaign: "Yes, there are blogs, listservs [automated email-based discussion lists] but the point of the campaign is to get someone to donate money, make calls, write letters, organise a house party." With the online systems deployed by the campaign, "[t]he core of the software is having those links to taking action – to doing something".²⁴ Running through the campaign's efforts was the harnessing of social networking techniques through my.barakobama.com the campaign's own bespoke social networking site, which came to be known by the shorthand of "MyBo". The MyBo site was used as a mechanism to cohere, organise and harness the energies of supporters rather than as a general means of communicating. Users of the site could readily liaise with others in their area and were given feedback on how they were doing compared to their fellow campaigners in meeting the campaign's goals. Zephyr Teachout, Howard Dean's internet director, notes that Blue State Digital, the software development company in Boston working for the Obama campaign, based the MyBo site around software applications (called "Get Local") created by the Dean campaign that were then further developed and integrated around the MyBo site. The campaign's kudos was such that it was able to enlist the services of 24-year-old

²³ See Daniel Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2012), chapter 1 (esp. Fig 1.1). Epub version.

²⁴ David Talbot, "How Obama Really Did It", *MIT Technology Review*, September/October 2008, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/410644/how-obama-really-did-it/>

Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook in developing its tools and strategy. Hughes who was drawn to Obama's message was known internally as the "online organising guru".²⁵ The MyBo site was the success story of the online campaign with over 2 million profiles resulting in 200,000 offline events, 400,000 on-site blog posts and 35,000 volunteer groups. Obama raised over \$500 million online from 3 million donors who gave 6.5 million donations at an average of \$80 a time.²⁶

To effectively harness the energies of so many people via the MyBo website/social networking system, the campaign sought a balance between allowing supporters some discretion in exactly how they organised activities on the one hand with ensuring that the campaign's strategic goals were pursued on the other. The idea was to promote the grassroots "ownership" of the campaign and at the same time co-ordinate activities such that they benefitted the campaign.²⁷ This approach was not merely technical; it was also a political message about what the campaign was doing. As Obama's New Media Director, Joe Rospars, made clear, "In everything we did, the narrative, the underlying expectation or message was that you have the power to affect the course of the campaign. And we maintained that throughout our online strategy." Campaign goals, however, shaped the expectation as to what form local initiatives took. This meant, for example, that states with a caucus system worked for eligible caucus turnout while other states organised a general get out the vote campaign. According to Teachout, "They've done a great job in being precise in the use of the tools. In Iowa it was house parties, looking for a highly committed local network. In South Carolina, it was a massive get out the vote effort." MyBo worked to

²⁵ Eric Boehlert, *Bloggers on the Bus: How The Internet Changed Politics and the Press* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 256; Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back*, chapter 6.

²⁶ Jose Antonio Vargas, "On the Web, Supporters of McCain Wage an Uphill Battle", *Washington Post*, 26 June 2008, accessed 1 June 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2008-06-26/news/36780703_1_mccain-supporters-obama-and-mccain-obama-supporters

²⁷ Talbot, "How Obama Really Did It".

bring people together in the caucus states and the early primaries; in later-voting states – such as Texas, Colorado and Wisconsin – by the time paid staff were directly deployed, according to the campaign, “they supplemented an already-built infrastructure and volunteer network” having been supplied with remote training and the “opportunity to build the campaign on their own”.²⁸ The campaign team sought to identify leaders they could work with or through; the target being 1,000 “precinct captain officers” in each state with “e-mail lists and good data” and to include these field organisers and volunteer co-ordinators in conversations taking place about campaign strategy.²⁹ In passing it should be noted that this does not mean that supporters were by and large corralled or turned into robots by the campaign. As Nielsen notes in extensive fieldwork with volunteers and paid staff in US political campaigns, despite scripting and close attempts to manage the message put forward by supporters, more often than not canvassers and phone-bank callers go off-message and often get involved in long messy political conversations. And while this may be troubling for campaign staffers, this personalised communication about the campaign to a public often cynical about air-brushed politics is at the core of the appeal of the personalised communication that such supporters provide.³⁰

While the main aspect of the Obama campaign’s online strategy was to organise supporters, a secondary aspect was to use the new communications technologies to reach out to as many sections of the electorate as possible. The Democrat vote was expected to benefit from increased turnout from young people and minorities. The Obama team co-ordinated and channelled this engagement through external social

²⁸ Abbey Levenshush, “Online Relationship Management in a Presidential Campaign: A Case Study of the Obama Campaign’s Management of its Internet-Integrated Grassroots Effort”, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2010): 325.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 326.

³⁰ Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, *Ground Wars: Personalized Communication in Political Campaigns* (Woodstock: Princeton, 2012).

media in addition to its internal systems. The Obama campaign had profiles on more than 15 social networks including AsianAve.com, MiGente.com and BlackPlanet.com (targeting Asian, Hispanic and black members respectively) on the basis that the campaign should go wherever people congregated online.³¹ Expanding the campaign's reach was important because sections of the electorate especially young people are considered difficult to reach and not fully engaged with, and therefore not readily accessible by, traditional media. The campaign's presence on external sites was treated sensitively – seen as setting up “embassies” – and there was an emphasis placed on getting people to join MyBo or else sign-up to receive campaign emails. The reach-out effort also took into account the rapid changes in generational adoption of communication platforms by using mobile. According to a Republican New Media consultant:

You have an entire generation of folks under age 25 no longer using emails, not even using Facebook; a majority using text messaging. I get Obama's text messages and everyone is exactly what it should be. It is never pointless. It is always worth reading and it is an action for you to take. You have hundreds of recipients on a text message. You have hundreds of people trying to change the world in 160 characters or less. What's the SMS [text-messaging] strategy for John McCain? None.³²

This was not quite the case – by the end of the campaign according to the Pew survey 17 per cent of McCain supporters received campaign messages via mobile compared to 28 per cent for Obama supporters³³ – but the Blackberry wielding Democratic nominee made full use of having supporters spread the message using

³¹ Sakaria et al, “#140ToWinIt”, 1.

³² Talbot, “How Obama Really Did It”.

³³ Ibid.

their mobile phones. The ability to have supporters re-post, re-tweet, re-send or simply “like” messages on Facebook leveraged personal connections to gain the sort of reach that impersonal mass media could not replicate. According to Andrew Rassiej, founder of Personal Democracy Forum, a politics/technology website, the Obama campaign also became a personalised media operation:

the campaign, consciously or unconsciously, became much more of a media operation than simply a presidential campaign, because they recognise by putting their message out onto these various platforms, their supporters would spread it for them. We are going from the area of the soundbite to the sound blast.³⁴

Perhaps the main perceived challenge of involving so many people for the Obama campaign was to maintain clarity of message. Traditionally campaigns have been at pains to control communication and carefully manage media coverage to minimise the impact of any gaffes, or of errant supporters, and to try to ensure political priorities and positions are made clear and consistent.³⁵ With interactivity comes a potential loss of control of the campaign’s message. One mechanism to minimise problems was the 100-strong Obama new media team³⁶ which worked closely with supporters and acted as consultants with campaign staff at a national and state level. The focus on activity, and especially on local activity, also minimised the extent to which the MyBo site became a forum for policy discussion or debate – with one or two exceptions discussed later. As one commentator noted of the MyBo site: “there

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Matthew R. Kerbel, *Netroots: Online Progressives and the Transformation of American Politics* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2009), 40.

³⁶ Levenshus, “Online Relationship Management”, 322.

seems to be little deliberation or even disagreement among this particular online community.”³⁷

The McCain campaign was always playing catch-up with the Obama online effort. Personally, McCain seemed more comfortable with more traditional forms of communication. McCain presented a regular radio broadcast seeming almost a throwback to previous modes of political address, though also leveraging the right’s domination of the talk radio format. McCain admitted that he was unable to use a computer and could not send an email. An Obama TV ad even tried to make this into an issue and Obama spokesman Dan Pfeiffer told the *LA Times*, “It’s extraordinary that someone who wants to be our president and commander in chief doesn’t know how to send an e-mail.”³⁸ The potential usefulness of online campaigning was far from unknown to McCain, however. In 2000 McCain raised \$1 million online in his New Hampshire primary victory over George W. Bush. The development of social networking tools nonetheless was well behind the Obama camp’s efforts developed as they were from Dean’s antecedents. An academic survey of leading candidate’s websites that compared McCain’s site with Obama’s in March 2007 noted that

While some aspects of the site, such as the “action center,” suggest that the website’s designers seem aware of the need to incorporate this type of engagement, the designers still cling to the notion that websites are, above all else, a forum for inscribing a candidate’s image/message. Because of its

³⁷ Caroline E. Dadas, “Inventing the Election: Civic Participation and Presidential Candidates’ Websites”, *Computers and Composition*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (2008): 429.

³⁸ Whether McCain had problems using email as a result of torture in Vietnam became the subject of controversy see, for example, the following two articles: Andrew Malcolm, “Oops, Obama Ad Mocks McCain’s Inability to Send E-mail. Trouble is, He Can’t Due to Tortured Fingers”, *LA Times Blog*, 13 September 2008, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2008/09/obama-ad-email.html>; Nico Pitney, “Yes, McCain Can Use Electronics”, 12 September 2008, accessed 1 June 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/09/12/yes-mccain-can-use-electr_n_126130.html

limitations, the McCain website only allows for a moderate level of user participation.³⁹

The McCain campaign had a social networking system of their own from February 2007 called “McCainSpace”, but it took time to fully develop, suffered from technical problems and was a poor alternative to that created by the Obama team. As late as August 2008 with just 70 days of the campaign left, McCainSpace was relaunched, the new software based on a generic social networking system without features built specifically for a political campaign.⁴⁰ The 70 days remaining was woefully insufficient time to build a community online.

The Clinton campaign was much less enamoured with the use of social media. Clinton, an established candidate, tended to work through existing institutions and with an existing base of support rather than open up the campaign to volunteers online. Clinton’s view approaching the Iowa primary was reportedly that caucus voters “do not look like Facebook”.⁴¹ The campaign’s overall approach militated against the development of online networking. According to Joe Trippi Howard Dean’s National Campaign Manager:

[Even if you] have all the smartest bottom-up, tech-savvy people working for you. If the candidate and the top of the campaign want to run a top-down campaign, there is nothing you can do. It will sit there and nothing will happen. That’s kind of what happened with the Clinton campaign.⁴²

³⁹ Dadas, “Inventing the Election”, 426.

⁴⁰ Todd Zeigler, “McCainSpace: Too Little Too Late”, *Brick by Brick Blog*, 28 August 2008, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://blog.thebrickfactory.com/2008/08/mccainspace-too-little-too-late/>

⁴¹ Cited in Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back*, chapter 5.

⁴² Talbot, “How Obama Really Did It”.

Existing networks of activists and organisations were unable to match the numbers Obama mobilised online. For example, in Texas Clinton had 20,000 volunteers against the 104,000 Texans that signed up at my.barakobama.com.⁴³ Towards the end of the campaign Clinton started to look to the internet in a limited way to raise funding – which effectively shored up the last three months of the campaign – however by that stage the momentum was firmly with the Obama camp.

The Renewed Importance of the Ground War

One way to understand the move to online campaigning is via the renewed emphasis in campaign strategy on employing people in electioneering on the ground. The idea of the importance of volunteers and paid workers for campaigns has been part of a longer-term change in campaign strategy of looking to the “ground war” (i.e. the personalised mediation of canvassers and phone bank callers) as much as the “air war” (i.e. mass mediated communication such as TV ads and mainstream news media). There was a relative decline in mobilisation from the 1970s as parties increasingly moved away from being sources of patronage.⁴⁴ In this period the parties suffered from institutional decay and an erosion of their activist bases. From then on raising support for particular campaigns became more feasible than on-going organisation for parties proper. Without a standing base of support, there is what Nielsen calls an “assemblage” of activists, concerned individuals, traditional groups such as organised labour and the parties themselves coming together around the campaign of particular candidates.⁴⁵ This ad hoc organisational form reflects the weakness of the party organisations and their main backers. For much of the late

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Nielsen, *Ground Wars*, 37-28. See also discussion on patronage in Morris P. Fiorina, and Samuel J. Abrams, *Disconnect: the Breakdown of Representation in American Politics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), chapter 4.

⁴⁵ Nielsen, *Ground Wars*, 20,28.

twentieth century having large numbers working for US presidential campaigns had been deprioritised in media-based campaigns. While in the 1968 election year the American National Election Studies showed 6 per cent of the population having worked for one of the candidates or parties the trend since then had been downward reaching a low-point in 1996 where only 2 per cent of the population were similarly involved.⁴⁶ In recent years, however, there has been renewed of interest in the ground war. The success of the Christian Right and then the mobilisations of union canvassers around the Nafta treaty, along with research pointing to the effectiveness of personalised communication, led to the reconsideration of how effective using people to front the campaign can be.⁴⁷ The revival in getting people out on the ground has been combined with attempts to use voter data to ensure that this effort is made where it counts most. In the 2000 election the Republican Bush-Cheney ticket was able to mobilise more volunteers – 450,000 – than could the Democrats with Gore-Lieberman.⁴⁸ However, through the use of targeted campaigning the Democrats used their numbers more effectively. According to the Republican campaign strategist Karl Rove, this led to the Democrats winning the ground war in the 2000 election.

The experience of Dean's 2004 campaign, where on the ground campaigning backed by substantial numbers of online activists, gave further impetus to developing the infrastructure for the ground war. Dean was elected chair of the DNC in 2005 and oversaw the creation of a national voter file and associated internal systems that have been used for the efficient targeting of potential supporters in local, state and national campaigns including Obama's. The development of such systems was a

⁴⁶ American Election Studies, "Worked for a Party or Candidate 1952-2008", accessed 1 June 2013, http://electionstudies.org/nesguide/2ndtable/t6b_3_2.htm

⁴⁷ Nielsen, *Ground Wars*, 44-45.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

substantial technical achievement and involved difficult negotiations to bring the state organisations of the party on board. The Republicans had nationalised their voter information in the mid-1990s but the Democrats were able to leverage the flexibility of web-based systems and work from the best innovations that the state parties had made. Nationalising and working to ensure the quality of the voter databases signalled a systematic approach to conducting a ground war and ensuring more seats were contested. The consistency of the data was vital for the Obama team to be able to build interfaces and mount a national internet-backed campaign. And as each campaign cycle progressed the data would improve: a condition of using the data was to feed updated information back into the system.⁴⁹

Taken in historical perspective there was indeed a growth in public participation in the 2008 campaign but this was only a partial reverse from previous decades where many more were engaged in campaigning or were approached by activists: 4 per cent of the population worked for campaigns in 2008 according to the American National Election Studies survey as against the 6 per cent in 1968.⁵⁰ Despite the huge number of volunteers Obama still needed to pay phone bank workers in the campaign.⁵¹ And despite the online donations, big business remained an important source of finance. Even the financial services sector, excoriated in many circles, remained an important source of campaign finance.⁵²

Rather than see the online aspect of the campaign, then, as an entirely new form of campaigning it might be better to see it as an efficient way of organising the ground

⁴⁹ Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back*, chapter 4.

⁵⁰ American Election Studies, "Worked for a Party or Candidate 1952-2008".

⁵¹ Nielsen, *Ground Wars*, 25.

⁵² Wall Street donations – including from employees – gained Clinton \$6.29 million from the securities and investment industry, compared with \$6.03 million for Obama and \$2.59 million for McCain. Janet Hook and Dan Morain, "Democrats are Darlings of Wall St.", *LA Times*, 21 March 2008, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/mar/21/nation/na-wallstdems21>

war of canvassing and phone banking and also for raising funds for the air war. A renewed emphasis on the ground war was partly because of the perception of diminishing returns from mass media advertising. An increasingly fragmented US media audience, the oversaturation of advertising and the limited effectiveness of campaign messages were all contributing factors.⁵³ Ironically, despite this, a major aspect of the campaign fundraising online was to pay for mainstream media advertising. The main expenditure of campaign resources was on television advertising. Obama, for example, spent at least \$250 million on ads – over \$100 million more than John Kerry in 2004. One 30 minute prime-time “infomercial” across several stations cost the Obama campaign about \$3 million, gaining 33 million viewers. McCain spent \$128 million – but was limited by the Federal Campaign Act when he agreed to take federal funding.⁵⁴ In comparison online ads across all campaigns amounted to \$50 million in total.

Blogging

Political blogging was seen as an important factor encouraging online activism in the 2008 election. The reach of blogging in the election was such that it came to rival mainstream print media. Towards the end of 2008, Daily Kos the behemoth of progressive blogs had a readership roughly equivalent to that of *USA Today*.⁵⁵ In October 2008 the home page of the Drudge Report blogging site was viewed more than 798 million times.⁵⁶ The blogs undoubtedly represented a fresher approach than the “horserace” coverage that according to the Project for Excellence in Journalism dominated mainstream media – although horserace coverage existed on blogs

⁵³ Nielsen, *Ground Wars*, 18.

⁵⁴ Kaid, “Changing and Staying the Same”, 418.

⁵⁵ Boehlert, *Bloggers on the Bus*, xi.

⁵⁶ Kaid, “Changing and Staying the Same”, 420.

also.⁵⁷ Political blogs were seen as credible and useful by the increasing numbers that viewed them. One study in 2004 found 90 per cent of blog readers said they became more knowledgeable about politics after reading blog posts and almost 75 per cent of blog readers found blogs to be “moderately credible” to “very credible.” Traditional media in contrast was seen by these readers as only “somewhat credible.”⁵⁸

A key reason that blogs represent a change in political mediation is because they are most often openly partisan in contrast to the default presentation of most mainstream US media. Bloggers follow many of US journalism’s default precepts such as the pursuit of truth; the idea of that blogs should fact check mainstream media is a common approach. However, journalistic norms of objectivity are considered secondary.⁵⁹ By taking subjective positions blogs are seen to narrow the gap between the individual and public discourse. For example, many politicians have taken to blogging for direct communication with citizens. Political discussion on blogs can be more informal and personal compared to the discussion in mainstream media. For one academic this is “illustrative of how personal and intimate narratives are increasingly used in political discourses” and so can “translate impersonal policies into the vernacular language of the lifeworld”.⁶⁰

Political blogs are a subset of a wider phenomenon. In 2008 an estimated 22 million adult Americans, or 12 per cent of internet users, had blogs. Fully 50 per cent of

⁵⁷ Cited in Katharine Q. Seelye, “2008 Coverage Focuses on the Horse Race”, New York Times Caucus Blog, 29 October 29, 2007, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/10/29/2008-coverage-focuses-on-the-horse-race/>

⁵⁸ Thomas J. Johnson, and Barbara K. Kaye, “Wag the Blog: How Reliance on Traditional Media and the Internet Influence Credibility Perceptions of Weblogs Among Blog Users”, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (2004): 631.

⁵⁹ Kerbel, *Netroots*, 103-105, 148-151.

⁶⁰ Stephen Coleman and Scott Wright, “Political Blogs and Representative Democracy”, *Information Polity*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2008): 3-4.

Internet users said they had read someone else's blog.⁶¹ It is estimated that 70 per cent of blogs are personal journals with 11 per cent of blogs covering political issues.⁶² In a wider sense the process of blogging is seen as an important potential counter to trends towards atomization and long-identified tendencies for individuals to see themselves as consumers rather than citizens. Siapera stresses the "authorial position" of the blogger whereby the blogger creates themselves as subject, through a subjective stance applied to gathered information and the interaction with other subjectivities that takes place through blog comment discussion. This can extend beyond narrow liberal individualism through its connectedness. For Siapera, this position does not conform to the colder communicative action posited by Jürgen Habermas as indicative of a public sphere but nor does it dissolve its author into disconnected hypertext as postmodernists such as Mark Poster suggest. The limitations for Siapera come rather with the extent to which the blogger deals with questions of "power" instead of lapsing into "emotivism" or else being party to "publicity" and subordinated in wider spectacle.⁶³

Despite the large numbers of bloggers only a few have established themselves with large numbers of readers. Outside the impact on individuals establishing the subjectivity that comes from authorship, direct claims for the democratization of public voices are undermined somewhat by the structuring of readership around a few key blogs. According to Bowers and Stoller writing in 2005, of the "few hundred

⁶¹ David D. Perlmutter, *Blogwars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

⁶² Richard Davis, *Typing Politics: The Role of Blogs in American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 14.

⁶³ Eugenia Siapera, "The Political Subject of Blogs", *Information Polity*, Vol. 13 (2008): 51-63.

thousand” US blogs discussing politics “less than one-tenth of one percent of them account for more than 99% of all political blogging traffic.”⁶⁴ Or, as Hindman puts it:

Most online content receives no links, attracts no eyeballs, and has minimal political relevance. Again and again, this study finds powerful hierarchies shaping a medium that continues to be celebrated for its openness.⁶⁵

For Hindman there is a pattern of online media concentration which even surpasses that of mainstream media: there are a handful of massively read blogs, a very large number of seldom, if at all, read blogs with a hollowing out of any middle layer.⁶⁶ The handful of widely read bloggers are said to establish a grouping that is now difficult to join – a blogging royalty or elite. There is the possibility of becoming established as posts are referenced by established commentators but this referral process suggests is something akin to a gatekeeper role has been recreated in the “blogosphere”. For Chait among progressive blogs this has encouraged a worrying trend to enforce a shared “political sensibility” as only those flagged onside by elite bloggers can “escape total anonymity”.⁶⁷

Even when taking into account the large numbers of bloggers, a common critique of how much they represent political democratization is that they are far from a representative cross-section of the population: they are predominantly white, educated male professionals. McKenna and Pole’s 2008 study of political bloggers found the majority of political bloggers are Caucasian, well educated, and male –

⁶⁴ Chris Bowers and Matthew Stoller, *Emergence of the Progressive Blogosphere: A New Force in American Politics*, New Politics Institute, 10 August 2005, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://ndn-newpol.civicaactions.net/sites/ndn-newpol.civicaactions.net/files/The-Emergence-of-the-Progressive-Blogosphere.pdf>

⁶⁵ Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 18.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 100, 140-141.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Chait, “The Left’s New Machine: How the Netroots became the Most Important Mass Movement in U.S. Politics”, *New Republic*, 7 May 2007, 22.

only a quarter were female and the majority were “aged 26 to 41.”⁶⁸ The demographics of blog readers are similar, Johnson and Kaye in 2004 found “90 per cent of blog participants were Caucasian, 77 per cent were male and 93 per cent reported some college or higher”. Alongside the blogosphere not being representative of the public at large, nor are these bloggers representative of those who volunteered for the campaign and contributed money.⁶⁹ Hindman is sensitive to the elision of the originators and readers of progressive blogs with the “much larger body of activists who gave money or time using online tools” that is a feature of much of the coverage of online politics.⁷⁰

For Davis, established elite bloggers who act as opinion formers have increasingly become enmeshed with political campaigns and the parties themselves through “transactional agenda setting”: “Political blogs affect politics through a transactional relationship with other agenda seekers (politicians, groups, political organization etc.), journalists and the audience.”⁷¹ The bi-directional relationship with journalists and parties modifies elite agenda setting rather than undermining it. Increasingly politicians, PR groups and political campaigns look to establish lines of communication with such established bloggers.

The Netroots and the Importance of Blogging

While in 2008 Obama from the outset looked to online support, in 2003 Dean was sought out by Democrat online campaigners. As *Wired* magazine argued, the

⁶⁸ Laura McKenna and Antoinette Pole, “What Do Bloggers Do: An Average Day on an Average Political Blog”, *Public Choice*, Vol. 134, No. 1-2 (2008): 97-108.

⁶⁹ Hindman, “Book Reviews”, 116.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁷¹ Davis, *Typing Politics*, 15.

internet “invented Howard Dean.”⁷² This was part of a wider pattern of Democrat online activists scouring the field for candidates they might support, sometimes setting up campaigns for candidates before the candidates themselves knew.⁷³ Dean and others supported by online pioneers were the beneficiaries of a political vacuum. Left-leaning Democratic activists were disconcerted at the lack of opposition to George W. Bush, the War on Terror and in particular the Iraq War that began in 2002. As one of the few major figures to oppose the Iraq War, Dean was taken up by online supporters. General Wesley Clark was similarly supported but his professional campaign team systematically dismissed and undermined online backers.⁷⁴ Alongside the lack of opposition to the Iraq War, activists also differed on the predominant Democratic approach of triangulating a position between that of Republicans and traditional Democrat policies. This strategy had worked in Bill Clinton’s second term to revive the presidency, but the absence of strong arguments in favour of traditional Democrat policies was considered as problematic for a section of activist-inclined Democratic supporters. Triangulation was seen as self-defeating because rather than make arguments that might win people over and challenge conservative framing of events, the party often seemed on the wrong end of a “52 48” split at the polls.⁷⁵ Howard Dean’s declaration that he represented the “Democratic wing of the Democrat Party” was pointed at the perceived timidity and insincerity of his party’s approach.

The growth of progressive blogs represented a turnaround from their position in the early 2000s; in 2003 it was estimated that conservative blogs had twice the

⁷² Gary Wolf, “How the Internet Invented Howard Dean”, *Wired*, January 2004 , accessed 1 June 2013, <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.01/dean.html>

⁷³ Matthew R. Kerbel and Joel David Bloom, “Blog for America and Civic Involvement”, *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2005): 3.

⁷⁴ Kerbel, *Netroots*, 36-49.

⁷⁵ Kerbel, *Netroots*, 8.

readership of progressive blogs, but by 2005 the positions were reversed.⁷⁶ The absence of strident Democratic figures and the poor infrastructure of the Democratic Party allowed space for these bloggers. The progressive blogs were seen as part of the “netroots” movement, a term coined in late 2002 by Jerome Armstrong founder of the MyDD blog – and informally known as the “Blogfather”.⁷⁷

We should note here that alongside the progressive blogs something of a wider infrastructure has developed. In addition to individual blogging sites there are several related online campaigning organisations such as MoveOn.org, Media Matters for America, and Think Progress. The most powerful is MoveOn.org, formed in 1998 in response to attempts to impeach Bill Clinton and which petitioned against the 2002 Iraq War. Moveon.org is a progressive campaigning organisation that acts as clearing house for multiple issues both institutional and contentious and has been notable in raising large amounts of money for a number of causes and running its own Political Action Committee.⁷⁸ As of 2008 MoveOn.org claimed 7 million members – although membership is free and without responsibilities or other qualifications. Media Matters for America is a research group formed to counter conservative disinformation and has played an important role in undermining Republican attacks through detailed analysis and fact checking.

It is important to understand that the motivation of online progressives is not solely about differences of policy with the mainstream Democratic Party, however. For Kerbel, rather their dispute centres on “power” in that they see the more assertive promotion of liberal values as the mechanism through which to get more Democrats,

⁷⁶ Bowers and Stoller, “Emergence of the Progressive Blogosphere”.

⁷⁷ Boehlert, *Bloggers on the Bus*, 48.

⁷⁸ Victoria Carty, “Multi-Issue, Internet-Mediated Interest Organizations and their Implications for US Politics: A Case of MoveOn.Org”, *Social Movement Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2011): 265-282.

and in particular more progressive Democrats, elected. Summarising Kerbel's survey of key progressive bloggers, Hindman argues:

The bloggers featured here are not extremists or naive idealists. They do not share ideological orthodoxy, though they agree on a series of diagnoses about what is wrong with the Democratic Party, contemporary media, and with American politics more generally. It is the quest to achieve a durable progressive majority – select “more, better Democrats” – that is bloggers' central goal. The divide between bloggers and Democratic officials is thus not about different policy preferences, but rather about strategies, tactics, and political process.⁷⁹

Kerbel describes progressive bloggers as a “bourgeois elite” in contrast to the “entrenched aristocracy” of the party establishment and the “proletariat” of active supporters such as were involved in the Obama network.⁸⁰

One important strategy difference has been where increasingly the Democrat Party has let what are considered Republican strongholds go uncontested. The rationale had been that resources would be better used in other parts of the country to shore up defences or else contest marginal territories. This left Democrat organisations in Blue states to atrophy and many potential activists isolated. Chris Bowers of the MyDD blog in response to this problem promoted a 50 state strategy which was initially dismissed by professional Democrat campaign strategists, but later promoted by Dean in his time as chair of the DNC. As Bowers pointed out, the difficulty was that the Republicans themselves could divert resources from uncontested seats to expand the places where they contested the vote and potential Democrat activist talent was going to waste. Part of the reason for netroots activism can be seen in

⁷⁹ Hindman, “Book Reviews”, 115.

⁸⁰ Kerbel, *Netroots*, 58.

individuals setting something up in places where tumbleweed was blowing through Democrat central.

Obama and the Netroots

Obama's relationship with bloggers has been described as a "cautious distance".⁸¹ In a roundtable on political blogging and the 2008 campaign in January 2008, Obama was considered third of the prospective Democrat candidates in terms of his engagement with progressive bloggers behind Edwards and then Clinton and was not noted otherwise in his presence in the "blogosphere".⁸² The lack of "outreach" itself was considered a reason to be wary of the candidate.⁸³ Indeed for much of the primary campaign Obama was not the preferred candidate for the netroots and there was no consensus among progressive bloggers on who they might support. While in 2004 Dean and Clark gained backing, there was no clear candidate to court in 2008 and none that wanted to directly pursue the netroots' agenda. As blogger Matt Stoller noted, "for progressives, the lack of leverage in the presidential race is disheartening".⁸⁴

In the early stages of the campaign there was a civility to discussions about the various Democrat candidates. However, as the field thinned and especially following Edwards' departure from the race in January 2008 the online debate became more pointed. To some extent this reflected the increasingly personal exchanges between Clinton and Obama. However, online, there was the impression by Clinton supporters that this had gone too far and that they were facing comments that were

⁸¹ Hindman, "Book Reviews", 116.

⁸² David D. Perlmutter, "Political Blogging and Campaign 2008", *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 13 (2008): 160.

⁸³ Kerbel, *Netroots*, 143.

⁸⁴ Lowell Field and Nate Wilcox, *Netroots Rising: How a Citizen Army of Bloggers and Online Activists is Changing American Politics* (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 168.

often ugly and vitriolic. For blogger Glenn Greenwald the attitude shown by many Obama supporters on the progressive blogs towards Clinton “really is indistinguishable from how the right hates her”. By March of 2008 one of the more established writers at Daily Kos staged a “strike” in protest at the treatment of Clinton supporters on Democrat supporting blogs. Boehlert argues that Clinton was not well-regarded because she “did not represent the blogosphere’s model of a fighting Democrat ready to wage partisan war with George Bush’s Republican Party.”⁸⁵ However this description would also not fit Obama. Obama has often struck up against the partisan nature of US politics and might easily in many ways be seen as politically centrist. Nonetheless Obama became the consensus candidate for the blogosphere. This was undoubtedly connected to the sense for many progressive bloggers that Clinton was an “establishment” candidate and the sense that her political approach might follow that of Bill Clinton and look, for example, to a strategy that triangulated political positions between a traditional Democrat approach and that of the Republicans.

In May 2007 Jonathan Chait writing for the moderate Democrat magazine *New Republic*, argued that the netroots had adopted the political style of the “conservative movement” by ultimately subordinating critical enquiry to the goal of supporting the progressive Democrat cause or movement and attempting to knock down those that failed to do the same. For Chait, “What they consider treasonous is any criticism of any part of the Democratic Party or its activist base from the right.” In effect they had, partly consciously, adopted Republican tactics by policing those on their own side that opposed what they saw as the interests of Democrat politics.⁸⁶ Chait’s argument

⁸⁵ Boehlert, *Bloggers on the Bus*, 119.

⁸⁶ Chait, “The Left’s New Machine”; Jonathan Chait, “Debating the Netroots”, *New Republic*, 7 May 2007, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/debating-the-netroots>

seemed somewhat vindicated by the closing of ranks once Obama became seen as the netroots' selected candidate and the hostility to those opposing this choice. This is not to say that there was no dissent – MyDD.com was one of the holdouts for Clinton supporters – but, once the Obama win was considered to be the goal, “The left blogs have basically become what they have despised about the right-wing blogs: cheerleaders for candidates and parties not for issues.”⁸⁷

Perhaps the issue that most tested the relationship between Obama and the netroots was on the subject of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). FISA was a bill to reduce constraints on government electronic surveillance which included particularly controversial retrospective immunity for telecoms companies that had worked with Bush on what many considered were cases of illegal wiretapping.⁸⁸

Glenn Greenwald, an “A-list” blogger who had authored several hundred posts on the FISA bill, raised the issue most stridently when in June 2008 Obama reversed position on his opposition to FISA. The controversy even spread onto the MyBo site when Mike Stark, a pugilistic blogger but also long-time Obama supporter, setup a “Get FISA Right” group. The group attracted 24,000 supporters and became the largest group on MyBo.⁸⁹ On 3 July – as many were preparing for 4 July celebrations – Obama responded on a MyBo diary posting of Joe Rospars which was followed with about 30 minutes of online consultation with policy staff. Obama argued the bill was not perfect but necessary for national defence. Obama conceded that “going forward, some of you may decide that my FISA position is a deal breaker. That’s ok. But I think it is worth pointing out that our agreement on the vast majority of issues that matter outweighs the differences we may have.” One angry poster in the

⁸⁷ Jeralyn Merritt cited in Boehlert, *Bloggers on the Bus*, 127.

⁸⁸ For more details see Glenn Greenwald, *With Liberty and Justice for Some: How the Law Is Used to Destroy Equality and Protect the Powerful* (New York: Picador, 2011), chapter 2.

⁸⁹ Boehlert, *Bloggers on the Bus*, 179-206.

discussion noted the implicit political opportunism: “You reap the benefits, then abandon the position to exploit another, thinking: Oh well, who else are they going to vote for?”⁹⁰ By this stage as the Democrat’s chosen candidate Obama felt able to vote for the bill including the clauses on retrospective immunity.⁹¹ In the mid-July Netroots Nation conference in Las Vegas that gathered 2,000 netroots supporters, Markos Moulitsas Zúniga who runs the Daily Kos site conceded it had been a “cluster fuck” but argued that everyone would soon get over it.⁹² The netroots focus on Democrat victory at all costs left little option at that stage.

New Campaigning?

For Shaw and Benkler the “already-mythical Obama online campaign” had been able to capitalise on “immanent practices in the left wing of the blogosphere”⁹³ and was “largely an extension of practices that already characterised the left-wing blogosphere rather than a new order imposed on a previously disorganised or nonparticipatory population.”⁹⁴ However, it might be better to see the initial enthusiasm of netroots supporters of Dean’s campaign as establishing the idea that the internet might be used to systematically wage the ground war and transform campaign finances through numerous small donations. Obama was able to leverage organisational innovations from the Dean campaign honed by campaign staffers and technologists combined with the Democrat’s newly minted national database infrastructure to full effect in “the unprecedented integration of its new media and

⁹⁰ MyBarackObama.com, “Response from Barack on FISA and Discussion with Policy Staff”, 3 July 2008, accessed 1 June 2013, <https://my.barackobama.com/page/community/post/rospars/gGxsZF/>

⁹¹ Michael Falcone, “Blogtalk: Obama’s F.I.S.A. Vote”, New York Times Caucus Blog, 9 July 2008, accessed 1 June 2013, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/07/09/blogtalk-obamas-fisa-vote/>

⁹² Boehlert, *Bloggers on the Bus*, 205.

⁹³ Shaw et al, “A Tale...”, 461,463.

⁹⁴ Shaw et al, “A Tale...”, 480.

field efforts”.⁹⁵ Bruns notes that the netroots discussions and deliberations that formed part of the Dean campaign did not mesh well with presidential campaigning – a lesson that Dean veterans themselves had taken on board:

As Howard Dean’s 2003/4 experiment with U.S. Presidential Primary campaign blogging showed, however, this community-driven model of political deliberation is ultimately incompatible with the personality-driven, celebrity-style politics of the late mass media age.⁹⁶

Obama’s internet campaigning, then, involved “limited volunteer action” rather than individual activity that might move “beyond campaign-imposed strictures”.⁹⁷ For Bruns the test of real engagement “will come as the communities of users which form around such sites express a desire to become involved in the policy development process itself.” – something that was never a real issue in the Obama campaign.⁹⁸ But as Kreiss argues it may be that presidential campaigns are not best suited to this type of mass deliberation:

As temporal entities with very clear metrics for success, campaigns simply are not designed to be the training grounds of radical democratic participation that many desire... Many supporters not only accept but embrace this, given the basic goal alignment between these campaigns and their supporters: the objective is to defeat rivals, not remake democracy.⁹⁹

Some netroots precepts have been more fully accepted – notably with the resources mobilised online the emphasis on the 50 state strategy has become possible.

⁹⁵ Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back*, chapter 6.

⁹⁶ Bruns, “Life Beyond the Public Sphere”, 65–79.

⁹⁷ Kerbel, *Netroots*, 136.

⁹⁸ Bruns, “Life Beyond the Public Sphere”, 74.

⁹⁹ Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back*, chapter 6.

However, despite the space opened up by dislike of the Bush presidency the assertion of traditional Democrat policies was limited. Dean's "Democratic wing of the Democrat Party" was replaced in Obama's campaign with opposition to the partisan turn in US politics. The netroots shared Obama's anti-Washington sentiments but for Obama, the capital was the host for partisan short-sightedness and gridlock, whereas the netroots saw it as the location for a timid Democrat leadership, fawned upon by self-interested consultants more interested in their jobs than Democrat victory. The impetus for the remaking of campaign organisation came from outside the Beltway and the netroots outlook favoured any victory, but a fervent expression of liberal/progressive values was sporadic at best in the Obama campaign. Despite its success, the Obama online effort does not necessarily mark the end-point for political mobilisations using the internet, however. MoveOn.org, for example, has acted to mobilise people around issues based on the metrics of people visiting its site to target flexible responses to a host of issues with just 20 staff in what Karpf calls an example of "organisation without organisations".¹⁰⁰ Nor are the netroots the sole form that progressive blogging may take – arising as they did from a particular political juncture.

Ultimately, the state of the art online campaigning system harnessed support but could not account for the levels of that support. In other words the networking took-off because people decided to invest themselves in the campaign. According to Obama's Iowa Caucus Director, Mitch Stewart "people really wanted to come to an event. Every campaign wants to be volunteer driven. But we recognised that incredible enthusiasm and we were able to harness that energy."¹⁰¹ Or as Stewart

¹⁰⁰ David Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁰¹ Levenshus, "Online Relationship Management", 326.

quoted one of his operatives saying, “Everyone’s built a sail, but we’re the only campaign with the wind to use it”¹⁰² Michael Slaby, Obama’s chief technology officer noted, “We didn’t have to generate desire very often. We had to capture and empower interest and desire.... We made intelligent decisions that kept it growing but I don’t think anybody can really claim we started something.”¹⁰³ Put succinctly by one software developer: they had built buckets so that they could capture the rain.¹⁰⁴

As perhaps was to be expected, the research here not found in the online campaign a novel source for new ideas on race. Rather it highlights the internet’s use by a section of Democrat activists on the one hand and the larger numbers who were involved in the Obama campaign on the other. This division supports Fiorina’s contention that the political sorting, around for example culture war issues, in the two main parties has not fully stamped itself on the wider electorate.¹⁰⁵ As with the wider election campaign, an understanding of how Obama won and especially of the changing role of race is not fully possible to discern online. The next section attempts a reconstruction of how race gained such importance in US politics, starting with a critique of the main way in which elections have been understood in the academy.

¹⁰² Ibid., 332.

¹⁰³ Kreiss, *Taking Our Country Back*, chapter 6.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Morris P. Fiorina and Samuel J. Abrams, *Disconnect: the Breakdown of Representation in American Politics*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012).

Part II

Understanding Race Historically

Chapter 4. Theories of Electoral Change

This chapter surveys the main way in which historical and political research has interpreted US electoral change, i.e. “partisan realignment” or “critical realignment” (often referred to simply as “realignment”). This is important because an appreciation of how elections are understood will provide insights for the thesis and such theories are ultimately being addressed. The chapter aims to sensitize the reader to the mainstream view of elections and also to an approach where race is largely taken as an external factor when it comes to electoral analysis.

This chapter used the wealth of academic journal articles on realignment and a few key studies around which these discussions were made. There are several hundred papers in peer reviewed journals on realignment. The key work used in the chapter to contextualise the wealth of research was the Rosenof book which superbly navigated the wealth of material.¹ This was discovered well into the investigation, but nonetheless helped to contextualise the papers and in particular the VO Key works and their relationship to the Chicago School of polling. Rosenof helped fully explain why a small article about a distant election had such pull over a long period of time.

Notably there was limited use of the idea of realignment in either academic papers or as reflected in the journalistic discussion. The theory was not used in any significant way to analyse the 2008 election. Rather the analysis is made to see the limits of realignment and the empirical approach to change where categories are treated as the same over an extended period of time i.e. with no sense that the categories under discussion are subject to changes in meaning.

¹ Theodore Rosenof, *Realignment: The Theory that Changed the Way We Think about American Politics*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

Given the analysis presented here the chapter does not attempt to apply the theory of realignment to the Obama election. Here we present a critique of the ability of the theory to connect with the changing categories with which it engages. In our analysis it is in the limits of this empirically based theorising that are demonstrated rather than ability for the theory to bring light to bear on the changes in the electoral sphere. Overall the theory of realignment uses the idea of loyalty as a stand-in for, as a watered down version of class analysis. Further the static way in which loyalty is understood speaks to the inability to grasp the changing meaning of the ideas under consideration. This might be considered a basic failing of the theory. It might be considered that this inability to get to grips with the changing character of categories is a failing that it shares with many of the theories of race and whiteness that we discuss in this thesis.

The inability of the theory to interconnect race and class which is a feature of the developments in US politics means that questions of race, as with much of US social science, only become important from the 1960s when race becomes a public issue despite the enormous effects race has over a great period of time. As the predominant US political science approach to elections the lack of connection with race is incredible. Rather than academic investigation being independent of the political situation it is striking that race becomes part of the academic discussion only with the civil rights movement. This shows the limited ability for the theory, through abstraction, to work independently from contemporary political concerns.

John Podhoretz's 2008 piece in *Commentary* magazine asks whether there is "An Obama Realignment?" Much of the article discusses how important Obama is:

That November 4 marked the emphatic end to one period in American political history and the no less emphatic beginning of another is a proposition no one seems to doubt.²

But after the journalistic bait, the switch: to find out what we are changing to “we need to return to politics”, there to dismiss Obama’s election (and his claims for realignment) as part of the chequered, confusing pattern of electoral results of recent decades.

Since the 1960s partisan realignment (also known as critical realignment or as a theory of critical elections) has been the predominant view of US electoral change among US historians and political scientists. Lichtman, writing in 1976, considered that this type of model has “dominated recent attempts to study political contests in the United States”.³ McCormick, in 1982, sees the realignment perspective “looms dominant” in the “most innovative and influential research”.⁴ Mayhew, in 2002, even while seeking to (fatally) critique realignment, describes it as being “one of the most creative, engaging, and influential intellectual enterprises ever undertaken by American political scientists”.⁵ Rosenof, in his excellent history of realignment, has it as “the theory that changed the way we think about American politics”.⁶ Looking

² John Podhoretz, “An Obama Realignment?”, *Commentary*, December 2008, accessed 31 March 2011, <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/35949819/obama-realignment>

³ Allan J. Lichtman, “Critical Election Theory and the Reality of American Presidential Politics, 1916-40”, *The American Historical Review* (1976): 317.

⁴ Richard L. McCormick, “The Realignment Synthesis in American History”, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Summer, 1982): 85.

⁵ David R. Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments: A Critique of an American Genre*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 1.

⁶ This chapter draws heavily on the Rosenof’s analysis of realignment. Rosen’s work is vital in that brings the theory into an historical perspective. In particular the chapter uses Rosenof’s insight that critical realignment became important because it addressed the continued importance of the New Deal coalition that had been missed and could not be accounted for by previous theories. Theodore Rosenof, *Realignment: The Theory that Changed the Way We Think about American Politics*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

forward, Carmines and Wagner, in 2006, “find great potential for future study under the realignment tent” and so seek to rescue the core approach of a “rich and fruitful intellectual tradition”.⁷ Despite being subject to some trenchant criticism, partisan realignment has maintained its status as the main theory through which long term electoral change is considered in the academy. While Clubb, et al, writing in 1990, argue that it is a “serious exaggeration” to say that the realignment viewpoint “dominates the study of American political history”, they nonetheless concede that it has become almost conventional for realignment eras to mark the periodization of political history, creating an “organising or synthesizing framework for the study and discussion of the American political past”.⁸ Even during periods where partisan realignment was seen as most lacking as an explanation, it could be argued that electoral change was being considered along the same axis as set by the realignment approach, but with a negative sign for both Democrats and Republicans, as *de-alignment* or even, for some, as the “decay phase” of realignment.⁹

Partisan realignment was first developed in 1955 by V. O. Key, Jr. in “A Theory of Critical Elections”.¹⁰ In his article, Key proposed the existence of an intense election, a “critical election”, such that through the election there are large-scale changes in support for the parties. The strength of change in voter loyalties means that the underlying pattern is set for several less-critical elections that follow. In other words, the critical election engenders a change in party support of large numbers of people of a deep and lasting kind that amounts to a “partisan realignment”. Key’s starting

⁷ Edward G. Carmines and Michael W. Wagner, “Political Issues and Party Alignments: Assessing the Issue Evolution Perspective”, *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 9 (2006): 67, 69.

⁸ Jerome M. Clubb, William H. Flanigan and Nancy H. Zingale, *Partisan Realignment: Voters, Parties, and Government in American History*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990): 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰ V. O. Key, Jr., “A Theory of Critical Elections”, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1955): 3-18; V. O. Key, Jr., “Secular Realignment and the Party System”, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1959): 198-210.

point was an empirical one. Key's study focussed on general election returns in the New England states (of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Maine and Connecticut) in the 1928 election with some comparison material of a less definitive but similar change in the 1896 election. Key shows a huge shift to the Democrats in the 1928 election which is, by and large, maintained through to the 1952 election and Key's own time. Key was not the first to look at the idea of lasting realignments in party loyalties¹¹ but he clearly and graphically illustrated the idea in such a way that it would have seemed to use history to illuminate his present day. Key lays out a graph that shows elections with close party competition end abruptly in 1928 – with some further consolidation in 1932 – where a sizeable gap appears between opposing parties. He paints a picture of a new landscape suddenly emerging out of the seismic eruption. Key's short paper makes no strong claims for the existence of critical partisan realignment outside of the 1928 election. He is circumspect about claims for other critical elections; he identifies none before 1928 and merely suggests that we may start to look for a similar pattern.

At first consideration a short paper written in 1955 about the 1928 election based on the pattern of voting in a few states seems too esoteric to affect so much of subsequent thought about US elections. However, the importance of Key's approach was not just as a historical theory about an election in New England almost three decades previously; it was a response to the general failure of US political scientists to spot the Democrat majority that emerged in these three decades. It was a reassessment of political science brought on by the shock of the 1948 election where pollsters expected and experts predicted a Republican victory, but the electorate produced a victory for the Democrats and Harry S. Truman campaigning on a New

¹¹ Rosenof, *Realignment*, 2, 12-13

Deal ticket. In so doing the underlying weakness of US political science at that time became apparent.¹²

The Truman victory of 1948 – and how it was accomplished – was a shock. Just two years earlier, in November 1946, the Republicans had won overwhelming control of Congress – of both the House and the Senate – something seen as clearly prefiguring presidential success. Even before the campaign Roosevelt's son had been manoeuvring to have Dwight D. Eisenhower nominated as the Democrat candidate in place of Truman. The Democrats were divided three ways. Against Truman was J. Strom Thurmond, a candidate in the South, opposing civil rights and the former US Vice President Henry A. Wallace on the left. Wallace had split off from the Democrats via the 1948 incarnation of the Progressive Party and was running on a platform supported by the American Labor Party. The Republican candidate, Thomas E. Dewey, had long been polling ahead, and the pollsters, following the understanding of the day that little would change at that stage, had ceased activities in April 1948. A *Washington Post* cartoon capturing conventional wisdom asked “What’s the Use of Going Through with the Election?”,¹³ and the *Chicago Tribune* printed a front cover announcing “Dewey Defeats Truman” (produced early due to a strike) that Truman ironically brandished with victory. Although Truman started complacently – his nomination acceptance speech stressed that the nation ought to simply be “grateful” for the material success brought by the Democrats – with defeat imminent his campaign became ferocious both in terms of energy and often in the

¹² Rosenof, *Realignment*, xvii.

¹³ Clifford Berryman, “What’s the Use of Going Through with the Election?”, 19 October 1948, *Washington Post* in National Archives, “Running for Office: Candidates, Campaigns and the Cartoons of Clifford Berryman”, accessed 31 March 2011, <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/running-for-office/index.php?page=45>

rhetoric defending the New Deal and attacking the Republicans.¹⁴ His 21,000 mile whistle-stop campaign tour made political use of, in particular, the Taft-Hartley anti-union legislation passed by overriding his presidential veto. The tour brought out massive crowds which increasingly shouted, “Give ‘em hell, Harry”.¹⁵ With the result, the *New York Times* had to conclude that this was a victory for New Deal ideas, and suggested that Truman, who himself had thought his chance of victory poor, “has probably never been so impressed with the strength of the New Deal philosophy”.¹⁶

To say that pollsters and pundits had failed in 1948 was one thing – after all, elections can bring upsets. However, as Rosenof argues, political scientists had little in the way of a framework that could accommodate this result. New Deal ideas had been considered as popular because they offered a response to the Depression. The effectiveness of these ideas in the absence of the Depression was something novel and there was a dearth of explanations of this effectiveness, or of this novelty, in the prevailing cyclic theories of electoral support. Likewise those academics whose business was surveying the electorate had failed to connect with those being surveyed such that they might have seen this alteration of viewpoint as latent. What was worse for the academy was that there had been twenty years to identify a change. Political scientists had thought that the “pendulum” was swinging back from Democrats to Republicans and that “politics as usual” would resume with the Republicans the default party of government. All the special factors had gone: the

¹⁴ Truman variously argued the Republicans were ready with the “economic tapeworm of big business”; “[Your Republican congressman] has done everything he possibly could to cut the throats of the farmer and the labouring man”; “[The Republicans have] begun to nail the American consumer to the wall with spikes of greed”. See Robert Griffith, *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, (Lexington, MA.: D.C Heath, 1992), 153-4.

¹⁵ Harold Evans, *The American Century*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), 414-415.

¹⁶ James Reston, “Truman Victory is Found to Contain Four Elements: New Deal Ideas, Truman’s Faith in Them, Clifford’s Tactics, Labor Held Responsible”, *New York Times*, 4 November 1948, accessed 31 March 2011,

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1948/11/04/85293134.html?pageNumber=8>

political mastery displayed by Roosevelt, the exigencies of war and of Depression were absent. While the post-war liberal trajectory towards the Great Society or indeed the importance of the New Deal coalition may seem clear from our retrospective vantage point, the sense was prior to the 1948 election that the New Deal and its coalition were a spent force. Political science had largely missed one of, if not the, biggest stories of the twentieth century.

What was apparent was that this was not a return to politics pre-1928: there was no swing back on the pendulum to the Republicans or continuity. There was something new. US political science as it approached elections; however, was not accommodating to substantial secular change, i.e. change over time. Rather, electoral analysis was dominated by cyclic theories. The overall idea was that within the party system when one party's programme was exhausted the other would take its place. So Louis H. Bean could write in 1942 that "[t]he existence of political tides in American history is usually taken for granted".¹⁷ Bean and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Snr. were the authors of the most influential of these cyclic theories.¹⁸ Bean's theorization of the cycle was more numerical and related more to the business cycle whereas Schlesinger's cycle owed more to alternating and mass psychological reactions to first excessively liberal and then excessively conservative policy.¹⁹ Although Bean was one of the few who predicted a Truman victory, it seemed his approach had little to say about the how and the why. That some dry statistics about the state of the economic cycle pointed to Truman said little about the ideas that had been deployed or the reaction to them. Schlesinger who was surprised by the election outcome could – rightly – argue that his approach looked at underlying

¹⁷ Louis H. Bean, "Tides and Patterns in American Politics", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (1942): 637.

¹⁸ Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Tides of American Politics", *Yale Review*, 1939.

¹⁹ Rosenof, *Realignment*, 20.

changes rather than guaranteeing exact election results every time, but it seemed that both the liberal/conservative pendulum swing and the business cycle failed to capture the power or character of the underlying change that Truman had harnessed. This is not to say that these two cyclical theories said that nothing changes over time, but that their secular components had insufficient explanatory power to grasp the enduring loyalties to the party of the New Deal.²⁰

To get a slightly broader view of Key's reinterpretation of electoral change it should be noted that his 1955 article does not stand alone. Often, though usually in passing, when citing the origins of the realignment school Key's 1959 article "Secular Realignment and the Party System" is included. Although as Ladd notes, while justifying skipping the piece in his critique of the realignment approach, "secular realignment has never loomed large in orienting disciplinary research"²¹, the article reinforces Key's sense of a need to replace cyclical theories and establish a sense of change over time. In "Secular Realignment...", Key – compared to his 1955 article – both uses more specific empirical data about trends in New England towns and also makes more general statements that derive from his data. Key compares voting patterns in New England states between those in industrial towns and the rest of the population. Whereas previously Key had shown a sharp discontinuity in 1928 – with the aftershock of 1932 – establishing new political terrain, here he looks at the figures in more detail to show secular trends within sub-populations. So again rather than a "cyclic" political tide pushing and pulling politics, Key attempts to bring out where a shift in a particular direction might be considered within the data. In this case, Key tried to show agglomerations of individuals establishing new party

²⁰ Rosenof, *Realignment*, 22.

²¹ Everett C. Ladd, "Like Waiting for Godot: The Uselessness of Realignment for Understanding Change in Contemporary American Politics", *Polity*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (1990): 513.

attachments over time. And, while the data here is less stark, Key's argument that there is the potential creation of new constituencies, through many individuals having similar experiences, has to be considered as empirically likely, if not perhaps a given. In the 1959 article Key further distances himself from cyclic theories by emphasising the role of leadership and a lack of inevitability; Key stresses the changes he is discussing are ultimately political rather than sociological, ethnic or demographic: a change in a group over time "in itself does not produce a realignment but it creates opportunities for exploitation by political leadership".²² Key considers these types of changes are distinct from any "peculiar factors" that operate in individual elections and take place in the long term – from a decade to a couple of generations. Among the examples of these phenomena that Key discusses are the formation of an industrial working class, the increase in the number of white collar employees, suburbanisation, and the falling away of ethnic identities over time.

Although it may seem that critical and secular realignment are unrelated other than they both attempt to explain shifts in electoral support, there is an important internal connection: they are both tied up with political inertia or resistance because of the weight of existing party allegiances. Critical realignment is based on the idea that there is a deep partisan attachment that must be overcome. Key's secular realignment is predicated on a lag, measured in years, between objective changes in a group and the working through of political consequences which Key argues is because of the durability of existing party attachments. So, for Key there are both long term processes of attrition working on and perhaps replacing existing party attachments, and occasional critical elections that, in the heat of crisis, re-form such deep attachments. As both types of realignment are related it is possible they

²² Key, "Secular Realignment and the Party System", 204.

interact and so it could be that, just as an example, a process of slow secular change might obviate the need for critical change.

The two types of realignment have, however, sometimes become a source of confusion. When discussing “realignment” it has become unclear whether this refers to the “critical realignment” of 1955 or to the secular realignment identified by Key in 1959 or to both. This thesis – following Ladd’s point that critical realignment has been the realignment with which the literature has been concerned – takes partisan realignment as referred to in Key’s 1955 piece on critical elections and refers where necessary to secular realignment specifically.

While Key seems able to address examples of both “critical” and long-term secular change in the electorate that previous cyclic theories were incapable of explaining, it is difficult to understand how central realignment theory became without reference to the influential “Michigan school” which had something of a symbiotic relationship with partisan realignment. The literature seems to underplay the strength of the relationship between Key’s realignment and *The American Voter*, published in 1960, the main work of the Michigan series from the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research, headed by Angus Campbell.²³ Rosenof shows Key often worked closely with Campbell especially as allies against the Columbia school.²⁴ Key considered the then dominant Columbia University approach to voter surveying as being too mechanistic, with a tendency to consider political outlook as inferable from social position. It was the Columbia view that influenced the decision in the 1948 election campaign to stop polling because it was considered that the electorate’s outlook would not change (as it was thought to be largely based on individual social

²³ Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960).

²⁴ Ladd, “Like Waiting for Godot”, 515.

situations that would not alter greatly in the last few months of the campaign and that had consistently been showing a preference for the Republicans).²⁵ Key was aware of Campbell's work from the early 1950s. Importantly, in April 1952, Key recommended Campbell test party loyalty in his surveys as a "better predictor" than other attributes and went so far as to suggest questions.²⁶ Key was keen to be able to move from survey data from individuals at the micro level through to his macro analysis.

Realignment theory and the survey work of *The American Voter* were able to support one another strengthening the coherence of both. Partisan realignment assumes an account of how the strength of partisan loyalties transcends the vagaries of responses to particular policies or a simple choice of what the policies and candidates are in one particular election year. The central realignment argument is that party support or identification is both strong and resilient and only some elections rouse sufficient passions to be able to fully overcome existing loyalties. One of the findings of *The American Voter* based on detailed surveys over three elections was to support a correlation of voting with partisan loyalty. And while *The American Voter* supported realignment, conversely, as McKay argues, *The American Voter's* thesis is supported by realignment: "the Democrat majority must have come from somewhere; it cannot be purely psychological. The answer is that there have been certain periods in American history when rapid social and economic changes have forged new political coalitions."²⁷ *The American Voter* needed something above the psychology of the surveyed individual to explain the levels of partisan support in place (or the prompts for that loyalty to change) and Key's numerically identified

²⁵ Paul Lazarfield head of the Columbia voting research school argued, "A person thinks socially as he is politically" cited in Rosenof, *Realignment*, 65.

²⁶ Rosenof, *Realignment*, 75.

²⁷ David McKay, *American Politics and Society*, 7th ed., (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 121.

theory of critical elections requires something with more fervour than large numbers of narrow, calculating *homo economicus*. Each theory, then, could stand steadily only by resting on the other.

It may be that the relationship between *The American Voter* and realignment has not been emphasised by those wanting to use and explore realignment because they do not wish to engage with the considerable specialised literature on the psychology of individual voters and polling technique, and that there is difficulty conceptually reconciling the political science approach and a psychological approach to electoral analysis.²⁸ Key, himself, for example, in his work with *The American Voter* researchers had what he considered a disputatious though productive dialogue. This relates to another possible reason the relationship between Key and *The American Voter* is not emphasised: Key's criticisms of its approach in his posthumously published 1966 work, *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting, 1936-1960*. This later work sought to counter some of the arguments of *The American Voter*. Key objected to what he saw as *The American Voter's* argument that the electorate was uninformed about the issues of the day and prone to make irrational judgements: Key's strongly held belief was that "voters are not fools".²⁹ Key suggested instead that there were those among the electorate which he called "standpatters" who were oriented towards maintaining party loyalty. Alternatively, there were those – he called "switchers" – who were much more likely to vote based on the record of the past party in office – this became known as "retrospective

²⁸ This is a concern of Morris Fiorina in particular. See for example Morris P. Fiorina and Samuel J. Abrams, *Disconnect: the Breakdown of Representation in American Politics*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012).

²⁹ V. O. Key, Jr., *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting, 1936-1960*, (Belknap Press, January 1966), 7 cited in L. Sandy Maisel and Mark D. Brewer, *Parties and Elections in America: The Electoral Process*, (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 81.

voting”³⁰. Here it seems that Key is attempting to step back from any narrow view of critical election theory that suggests an electorate that is prone to blind loyalty and unthinking responses. However, at the same time, this places qualifications on how much realignment and voter loyalty/partisan attachment can be seen as comprehensive explanations of the critical changes he identified when it was necessary to categorize types of voters and bring retrospective voting into the mix.

It is also important to note that despite realignment becoming the central thrust of understanding US elections, Key’s initial focussed approach on 1928 has been – and remains – contentious. Key argued, following Samuel Lubell, that the changes he identifies start not with a reaction to Hoover’s failure to deal with the Depression but in Hoover’s 1928 Democrat opponent, Al Smith, who was responsible for the “activation” of new Catholic immigrants “in New England, at least”.³¹ However, *The American Voter*, suggests instead that much of the vigour of the 1928 election related to Al Smith’s Catholicism rather than his ideas on social reform. It then becomes questionable whether the 1928 election is a foretaste of what was to come in 1932 and subsequently. Alan Lichtman following this line points to the novelty of a Catholic candidate with a chance of winning as being behind some of the features of the 1928 election. He also stresses that the divisions of religion often followed into a division between town and country – and so while levels of voting may seem to go in the same direction, the factors in 1928 did not play through into 1932. What we have, according to Lichtman, is not a complex of the 1928-1932 elections but distinct events. Ladd in contrast argues that scholarship has noted “changes manifest in the New Deal years began long before the Great Depression”.³² Indeed, while it seems

³⁰ Rosenof, *Realignment*, 82.

³¹ Key, “A Theory of Critical Elections”, 4.

³² Ladd, “Like Waiting for Godot”, 518.

logical that the competing responses to the Depression between Hoover and Roosevelt are what would have forced the electorate to reassess strong commitments in this period and thus 1932 would be a more likely location for critical change, it would seem that as a *historical* point that the experience of the 1928 election would at the very least have prepared an important part of the New Deal coalition through the testing out of arguments and organisation.³³ Further, although religion might seem the divisive point in 1928, it may be that the ecumenical differences are, at least in part, the form in which the town/country and recent immigrant/nativist divides surface. Once surfaced both differences would be expected to play a part in the reception and development of New Deal style populist politics. In subsequent work Kristi Anderson has argued that the activation or recruitment of a new generation of voters who were the children of recent immigrants played the most important part in creating a New Deal majority.³⁴

Indeed, Key was aware of the difficulties of whether to separate or combine 1928 and 1932. He struggles with whether activating or converting (i.e. formally speaking re-aligning) taking place in 1928 – favouring converting, though without a clear basis.³⁵ The empirical method adopted by Key could not tease out the difference between activation and conversion, because the difference was just not apparent in the simple aggregate empirical data of votes cast. This difficulty, however, could simply be eliminated by many of those that worked with the realignment thesis who were not so circumspect as Key about the use of the critical election approach. *The American Voter* itself, for example, bypassed the difficulties in identifying the roles of particular elections and of identifying a critical realigning *election* by adopting the

³³ Lichtman, “Critical Election Theory...”, 319-320.

³⁴ Kristi Anderson, *The Creation of a Democratic Majority 1928-1936*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

³⁵ Rosenof, *Realignment*, 54-56.

idea of a realigning *era*. Such critical changes could then, perhaps, take place over several elections:

Although Roosevelt's margin of victory in 1932 was large (59 per cent of the two-party vote), it was not until 1936 that the Democratic wave reached its peak. The long-entrenched Republican sympathies of the electorate may not have given way easily in the early days of the Depression. Had not Roosevelt and his New Deal won the confidence of many of these people during his first term – or even his second – there might well have been a return to earlier party lines similar to that which occurred in 1920. From this point of view we might speak not of a realigning election but of a realigning era.³⁶

Interestingly this formulation poses the response to the New Deal as an aberration from the standard cyclic political pattern as a wave upsetting the tidal ebb and flow. However, it is more important for the elision of the different reactions of different parts of the electorate combined under the rubric of realignment. Here those supporting the 1928 campaign are brought together with those falling into the Democratic camp as late as 1940. It would seem at least open to question whether the type of slow and staggered secular change identified here as a realigning era is the same character as that of the explosive change of one election brought out in Key's empirical data.³⁷ Key's formulation of standpatters and switchers, and his view of activation and conversion are attempts to at least conceptualise such differences and the meanings that lie behind the numbers or behind the many new partisan attachments. In passing, it should be noted that this discussion relates directly to our

³⁶ Campbell et al, *The American Voter*, 535.

³⁷ Burnham was keen that the two remain distinct arguing that being able to identify critical as opposed to longer-term secular movements was a vital part of the theory. Burnham, *Critical Elections*, 6.

own era. Those looking for a 1930s style reaction – i.e. a New Deal style leftist/populist realignment – to the present crisis might consider that only in the context of political parties and outlooks already in position in 1928 prior to the Depression does the New Deal reaction fully make sense.³⁸

Together with a looser conception of the time over which realignment took place, *The American Voter* took up the circumspect conclusion of Key's 1955 article that "Further development of an electoral typology would probably point to useful speculation in a variety of directions".³⁹ *The American Voter* drew on Key's work seeking to pin down an electoral classification by adding to his maintaining election (where existing partisan attachments remain intact), and realigning election (where new partisan attachments are formed), a deviating election where: "the basic division of partisan loyalties is not seriously disturbed, but the attitude forces on the vote are such as to bring about the defeat of the majority party".⁴⁰

Again *The American Voter* attempts to make realignment more general, in this case by adding flexibility in a way that distinguishes between short-term "attitude forces" and longer term party identification. Thus, for example, Eisenhower's two terms as Republican president could clearly be marked off as the result of "deviating elections" with the "attitude forces" at work – of voter identification with a national hero, i.e. liking Ike. The deployment of the diffuse concept of attitude forces weakens the definition of a deviating election and brings into question the character of "partisan" attachment that might readily coexist with a vote against the party of attachment.

³⁸ See, for example, Thomas Frank, *Pity the Billionaire: The Hard-Times Swindle and the Unlikely Comeback of the Right*. (London, Harvill Secker: 2012).

³⁹ Key, "A Theory of Critical Elections", 18.

⁴⁰ Campbell et al, *The American Voter*, 531-533.

Another point to consider is that while Key's theory was a response to the enduring effect of the New Deal coalition (at this stage fully from 1928 to 1955), it was couched in such a way that it did not look to New Deal politics, but rather to the mechanism of party identification as an underlying factor that could explain changes not always readily apparent on the surface of politics. Rather than deal directly with why New Deal arguments had such staying power, the more general and indirect idea that a party had gained strong and enduring loyalty became the locus for investigation – and so particular policies or ideas of the party in question could remain amorphous in this formulation at the very least at the initial stages of any enquiry. This meant that the psychological aspect of the electorate as having loyalty or strong identifications with a party as raised in Michigan school surveys came to the fore. It was unnecessary to test why or how much voters were loyal to particular parties or to particular party policies to see whether the pattern applied; all that was required to establish critical realignment was an enduring change in party identification. With this approach, it became possible – and there was an implicit invitation even in Key's circumspect initial work – to trawl historical data looking for patterns of a critical election at play in other US elections. With *The American Voter* understanding that there may be critical eras rather than simply critical elections, a broader range of two or three elections where an enduring change in party loyalty took place could be sought. Without historical voter survey data on party identification the test would be simply applied against voting patterns and partisan attachment implied and often assumed.

When looking for patterns of critical elections/eras, there is another assumption being made that party loyalty is an independent variable, that continued support for a party could be considered as much the same thing in different elections and different

times. To put this in perspective, consider something like class identification; it seems clear that class identification means different things at different periods, in different places and for different classes. Likewise being a Republican in 1928 means something different to being a Republican in 1980, 1968, 1948 or even 1932. For such a strong reading of party identification in and of itself, there is the supposition that party identification or loyalty has something of a timeless or constant character both at the level of individual psychology and for aggregate voting data. Loyalty and identification would at minimum seem relative to what that loyalty is being tested against or identified against. That the loyalty in question often seems unable to pass the test of one of the several deviating elections should cause consideration of the quality of such loyalties, for example the idea of strong, deep partisan attachment. More specifically the sense of mutual reliance of party and those people involved in New Deal programmes, formed during the depths of the Great Depression would seem to have a novel character as would the war-time organisation that followed it. Indeed, fixing the idea of partisan loyalty hides the problem of explaining particular loyalties.

When comparing voting patterns across different historical periods there are limitations to how much can be gleaned. A long period of a particular party's dominance following a particularly hard fought and intense election, would suggest a larger role for the hard-fought election than previously thought and to further enquire just what was settled in the contest in a way that was not previously considered. However, the strength of the pattern in 1928 identified by Key, of being something that could not readily be accommodated by a cyclic theory might cause a pause for thought. That previous electoral results could evidently be interpreted as ebbs and flows was evidenced by the preponderance of such cyclic theories. But the thesis is

that 1928/1932 produced something powerful enough to echo or persist into the election of 1952. Perhaps there was something here that should be investigated in its own specificity and studies that establish what is distinct, might be necessary before being able to establish comparisons. Investigating what the ideas were and how they imprinted so strongly might seem to be a logically prior problem to resolve.

After Key, the main figure in the development of realignment theory is Walter Dean Burnham. In his influential *Critical Elections and the Wellsprings of American Democracy* published in 1970, Burnham sought to defend and develop realignment.⁴¹ In his book Burnham wanted to tighten up critical realignment as a theory by more clearly defining it and linking it to general features of US politics. Burnham goes so far as to argue that in the literature until that point “one is impressed with how little theorizing has been forthcoming” that uses the idea of critical realignment to analyse American politics “across time and space”.⁴² To develop critical alignment as a theory Burnham uses the Weberian device of an ideal-type. Burnham’s “characteristic” critical realignment is short, involves at least 20-30 per cent of the electorate changing allegiance, is intense in both the campaign and the nomination, usually has a high turnout, and alters or even overthrows the organisation and leadership of the parties involved.⁴³ These initial points roughly go along with the thesis as already stated. It is, however, with subsequent points in his definition that Burnham should be seen as moving the theory on.

⁴¹ Burnham was still engaged in this project as late as 2006. See Walter Dean Burnham, “Lecture: Critical Realignment Revisited”, 5 April 2006, accessed 31 March 2011, http://www.laits.utexas.edu/la_lecture_archive/vid1/index.html

⁴² Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics*, (New York: Norton, 1970), 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6-8.

Critical realignment, argues Burnham, should be considered as a phenomena related to the scale and heterogeneity of the US political process.⁴⁴ Following Lowi, he sees that, unlike the more cohesive mass organisations of European politics, in the USA parties are “constituent parties”; they are made up of separate groupings or constituencies whose approach is under construction rather than being fully formed. The diversity of such a party’s components means that it is only through a political process that the party is made more coherent and leadership emerges. The electoral process is about the formation (and re-formulation) of the parties themselves at the same time as acting on the electorate – the extended party primaries where candidates attempt to unite the party before trying to unite the nation are evidence of this. Using Lowi’s temptingly enigmatic formulation, Burnham argues that, “electorally, American parties represent outcomes *in general*; parties seldom shape or represent outcomes *in particular*”.⁴⁵ Thus, for Burnham, realignment happens not just as an electoral result but acts as something that re-constitutes the parties and their leadership – sorting factions and personnel and through this resets a deep relationship with their constituents.

The other US-specific factor is the designed-in inertia of the US political system. Rosenof sees the use of this insight as arguably Burnham’s most original contribution: the checks and balances and separation of powers, i.e. the design of US government that sought to temper change and thus stymie the possibility of autocratic government, builds up frustration and bottlenecks that can only be resolved by an explosive response that emerges periodically in response to these tensions.⁴⁶ For Burnham, then, it is the relative conservative rigidity of the system of

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁶ Rosenof, *Realignment*, 120.

government which leads, ironically, to the repeated eruption of realignment at the polls. This is important for realignment because the focus on institutional political arrangements lessens – without necessarily eliminating – the reliance of the theory on the idea of partisan loyalty and its relationship with psychology. One might suggest that in this view, institutions and policies buffered by constitutional arrangement from easy alteration require a strong, clear shift in partisan support to be remade. The focus on institutions also suggests an international point of comparison and contrast with which to test the theory – and perhaps partially account for the low take-up of realignment theory as a way of explaining electoral change in other countries.⁴⁷

Burnham's arguments about constitutive parties and a political system oriented against change seem to move realignment theory on and suggest useful points of tension to explore. However, he is also notably linked with the attempt to reinstate a cyclic character to realignment. And while Burnham notes that the periodicity of critical election is variable – of roughly 30 years – and that shocks external to the political system seem to prompt the realignments,⁴⁸ he also sees “approximately once a generation”,⁴⁹ “a broadly repetitive pattern of oscillation between the normal inertia of mass electoral politics and the ruptures of the normal which realignments bring about is clearly evident from the data.”⁵⁰ The critical realigning elections that Burnham identifies numerically are divided by between 30 and 38 years, however the series under investigation contains just five such elections. Critical elections have been mooted for elections in 1800, 1828, 1860, 1896 and 1928-1932.⁵¹ However, to

⁴⁷ For example Mayhew calls realignment an “American” genre. Mayhew, *Electoral Realignment*.

⁴⁸ Burnham, *Critical Elections*, 26-27 (p13?).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵¹ McCormick, “The Realignment Synthesis in American History”, 85.

empirically derive a theory of cyclic elections from such a small sample seems like overreach. Burnham's generational point does fit well with realignment. Existing loyalties might falter because the memory of the event that prompted the realignment and the memory of the realignment itself would fade over time; thus the partisan loyalty based on this would also fade, with some new voters perhaps not yet alive at time of the realignment, only gleaning a weaker, second-hand version of why a party might be trusted and supported. However, although this points towards an important reason for the potential weakening of existing loyalties it does not speak to why there might be a new generational impetus *for* deep-cutting realignment. Taken as a whole the idea that conditions for a realignment would conveniently occur every 30 or so years seems arbitrary rather than given, as it requires the following elements – at least – to line up: external shocks linked to the identified realignments, the constitutional system's inertia having built up enough resentment to prompt explosive change in a particular direction, and a successful response to events made available outside of the dominant leadership in the ruling party.

The other problem with Burnham's intimation of a generational/cyclic realignment was that it became increasingly difficult to identify a new realignment arriving to meet his schedule – roughly 1960-1968. An early writer on the subject and one of the most influential was James L. Sundquist. He was looking to analyse why realignment, which seemed to be so successful in helping to periodize US politics, seemed not to be working for contemporary elections. Writing in 1973 he was dismissive of the idea of cyclical realignments that “simply read too much precision into history”.⁵² Instead

⁵² James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*, (Washington: Brookings, 1973), 36.

his focus was to investigate what the drivers for realignment might be through an examination of the issues that required rapid change from the electoral process.

To investigate how political issues might play a part in realigning an electorate Sundquist creates a hypothetical “preliminary”⁵³ model of a community where the existing political setup struggles to contain a powerful new issue. Views on the new issue have an appeal that works across existing party lines and if the issue is strong enough a reorganisation that reflects these new divisions can take place. He argues there are five variables that determine whether such an issue will bring such a realignment: the breadth and depth of the underlying grievance, the capacity of the proposed remedy to provoke resistance, the motivation and capacity of the party leadership, the division of the different sides on the new issue in the existing parties, and the strength of the ties that bind voters to existing parties. The simple model that Sundquist creates lets him clearly make the point that both the issue itself and also the political context in which the issue arrives play a part in determining whether realignment takes place.⁵⁴ Sundquist approvingly quotes Kevin Phillips that “[A]n electorate that could be realigned at one time only by the most powerful of polarizing issues may be realigned in later years by one much weaker”.⁵⁵ Realignment then, argues Sundquist, requires an issue that cuts across existing party lines. Further, the issue must manifest as a political concern rather than being just an identified social change, must be a major issue – that has a “lop-sided” effect – to polarize the electorate and be amenable to distinct responses. And, for Sundquist, it must be a new issue that arises when older issues have, at least to a degree, faded.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid., 298.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 25-29.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 276.

The old issues, then, were unlikely to become realigning issues – at least in their present form. The 1928/1932 realignment was, according to Burnham, based on “ethnic/class” divisions. And, while an important part of the assessment of the New Deal realignment was its continuance through the 1948 election, Sundquist argues that the “Bloody shirt” revival of class antipathies” by Truman in 1948 soon faded – and conciliatory figures were brought into government despite the campaign rhetoric. With Truman’s departure from politics and the arrival of 1952 Democrat candidate, Adlai Stevenson, the “move towards the centre” was further consolidated.⁵⁷ So, while the existing alignment was based at least in part on class, the post-war USA was largely built on consensus on class issues and maintaining many New Deal institutions.⁵⁸

With criteria in place, Sundquist could then assess the issues in play and whether they might point towards a partisan realignment. For example, from the mid-1960s, there was a sense of crisis which came together in as the “social issue”:

Ghetto riots, campus riots, street crime, anti-Vietnam marches, poor people’s marches, drugs, pornography, welfarism, rising taxes, all had a common thread: the breakdown of family and social discipline, of order, of concepts of duty, of respect for law, of public and private morality.⁵⁹

Sundquist argues that the “social issue”⁶⁰ was too diffuse to act as a realigning issue. It was in fact many issues that could then have different responses even from one individual. So, for example, someone wanting a crackdown on drugs might yet

⁵⁷ Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, 216.

⁵⁸ So, for example, in 1971 Richard Nixon declared himself a Keynesian. Nixon’s stated that “I am now a Keynesian” following the setting of expansionary economic policy. Leonard S. Silk, “Nixon’s Program – ‘I am now a Keynesian’”, *New York Times*, 4 January 1971.

⁵⁹ Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, 383.

⁶⁰ Scammon and Wattenberg first developed the idea of the “social issue”. See Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Primus, 1992 [1970]), 35-44.

support anti-Vietnam protests or be in favour of the freedom to consume pornography. Additionally while these issues invited some strong – potentially realigning – responses, the programmatic response was not evident. Other than broad demands to “get tough”, what might be done to respond to this diffuse sense of crisis was unclear.⁶¹ And, even then, all parties declared themselves against crime and disorder.

The most powerful issues that might cut across party lines and so reorganise the parties, and the rest of the polity, are race and civil rights, argues Sundquist. (Race also lent some of its power to the social issue which it was associated with.)⁶² He identifies as a particularly important period as the 1960s where both Democrats and Republicans had wings of the party that sought to maintain white privilege. There were two main leaders who might be said to oppose civil rights advances in the 1960s. The first, Barry Goldwater was the Republican nominee in the 1964 election. He ran on a states’ rights ticket rather than giving overt support to segregationist policies. The second was George C. Wallace, who attempted the Democrat nomination several times, and stood for the American Independent Party (AIP) in 1968. Goldwater gained the Republican nomination in 1964 and was, however, crushed by Lyndon B. Johnson. Wallace gained about 9 million votes mostly from Southern Democrats, establishing what was to become an important precedent in the “solid South” in 1968 as Nixon squeezed through against Hubert H. Humphrey.

Sundquist argues that although there were segregationists in each party there were also pro-civil rights factions and ultimately moderate centrist elements in the parties were strong enough to keep control. He ascribes some of the reticence to reorganise

⁶¹ Ibid., 387.

⁶² Sundquist refers to this at one point as the “racial-social issue”. Ibid., 393.

as Democrat segregationists being unwilling to try to make a home with hostile Republicans in the South and to Wallace abandoning the AIP to try to return to the Democrat fold. The Republican leadership at a local level was generally not open to race-based campaigning having set themselves up against discrimination. Sundquist quotes a liberal Republican of the time, “The Republican party will never go racist because the liberals won’t let it... They can’t afford to lose us. We include the big contributors and the press, and they can’t win without us.”⁶³ Sundquist argues that the local Republican leadership acted as a buffer to the take-up of the segregationist outlook of Wallace and his supporters. The existing Republican elite were a “country club” set isolated from, and so not concerned with, competition with blacks for jobs or housing, nor were they socially amenable to bringing segregationists into their ranks. That said, Wallace’s votes were tempting, and so the use of race was trialled in South Carolina in 1970. It failed with many Republicans defecting and Wallace voters reverting to – perhaps considering themselves to have a partisan attachment to – the Democrats.⁶⁴

In the absence of a major realigning issue, Carmines and Wagner have sought to use a modified version of Sundquist’s reading of realignment. In an article to assess the “issue evolution perspective”, Carmines and Wagner explain that they want to incorporate the idea of a cross-cutting issue into their approach but that “most partisan change occurs incrementally over long periods of time” and so a type of secular realignment should be the preferred mode of analysis today.⁶⁵ Rather than expecting a single cross-cutting issue to change party loyalties, they argue that there are currently a number of smaller issues, creating a dynamic “issue competition”

⁶³ Ibid., 392.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 366.

⁶⁵ Carmines and Wagner, “Political Issues and Party Alignments”, 70.

(though the term “dynamism” seems somewhat at odds with the suggested slow pace of realignment). The default method then should be to assess such issues and in particular the process of transmission from elite – through an important layer of activists – to the electorate. In this view the attachments to parties are magnified by the electorate gravitating towards ideas they have a strong emotional attachment to and which are further amplified by organic links with activists.⁶⁶ Carmines and Wagner’s perspective posits a relationship between elites, activists and public that has been undermined by Fiorina et al in their empirical study showing that electorate has generally not followed elite polarisation.⁶⁷ Moreover the idea that the type of deep partisan attachments, discussed in both critical realignment and in Key’s secular realignment, might be formed on a large scale by a process of ideologically fishing for voters seems unlikely.

While it has been difficult to find realignment, this could always be just a matter of time, and so a difficulty that relates more to the core of realignment has been the decline in party identification. Many authors, from at least the 1970s – began to note that there were a growing number of the electorate counting themselves as independents and that generally there was a weakening of association with politics and the parties themselves. This move away from party identification has often been called dealignment.

Rosenof notes three different responses to incorporating dealignment into a realignment approach. The first was that dealignment was happening rather than, or as an alternative to, realignment. The second was that dealignment was a particular

⁶⁶ Ibid. 70,71, 74.

⁶⁷ Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006). Although Fiorina et al provide evidence that a polarisation of ideas has not as of yet affected the electorate they do accept that there has been a process of ideological sorting within the parties themselves.

case of realignment (though this seems to stretch definitions too far). Thirdly, dealignment was incorporated into a standard feature of a long electoral cycle. The last point was developed by Paul Allan Beck in 1979 when he attempted to integrate the generational aspect of dealignment into the electoral cycle.⁶⁸ For Beck, dealignment automatically starts when new voters who did not experience the events surrounding the critical election become part of the electorate. This is similar to the point Burnham makes to support his argument for periodicity, but it stresses that without some type of realignment then inevitably the deep partisan attachment created through a critical election will decay over time. Further, argues Beck, this can then be seen as part of an extended electoral cycle moving from realignment, to some stability and then dealignment. While Beck makes an important point that the allegiances forged in a critical election are not timeless and self-sustaining there is more to consider than individual memories in political allegiance. It would seem at least plausible that the achievements of a party might linger past the election via the institutional, policy or organisational forms they take. There are mechanisms for a collective memory in politics that are active on a level wider than that of individual experience and might even reinforce as well as renew partisan attachments. So, while, up to a point, Beck's assessment makes sense, there is an argument that without a clear realignment that it might be better to consider that something new has happened: that at least for now dealignment has replaced realignment. By standing back from realignment theory for a second, the idea of a prolonged, widespread political disenchantment demands further explanation.

⁶⁸ Paul Allen Beck, "The Electoral Cycle and Patterns of American Politics", *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1979): 131.

Waiting for realignment has become difficult for empirically aligned political scientists. Even with changes in the parties in office, “underlying party identifications remained unchanged or were changing only glacially”.⁶⁹ Forty five years of anticipation, of waiting for such change, may have become wearing. Carmines and Wagner argue that critical realignment as it was originally understood has “disappeared as a phenomenon”.⁷⁰ For Ladd writing in 1990 waiting for realignment had turned political scientists into the characters from Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.⁷¹

Harvard academic David R. Mayhew’s 2002, book-length attempt to undermine realignment, *Electoral Realignments: A Critique of an American Genre*, argues that it is now time to abandon the realignment perspective that after initial innovation brought diminishing returns and that the weight of previous theory has “blinkered” graduate students and created “opportunity costs” for those wanting to develop new ideas. Mayhew can see little of a coherent “conceptual structure” in the canon and so he takes up realignment via 15 empirical claims he has selected from the literature.⁷² This prompts the question that if one could not untangle the complicated structure of the theory, how could one untangle the empirical claims? Mayhew presents the “essential” claims of the realignment taken from a “fully fleshed-out maximally ambitious version of the realignment perspective”.⁷³ However, it is unclear why the most ambitious version would be used when looking to extract the theory’s essence. The answer for Mayhew is this version “has proven, I believe, to be particularly

⁶⁹ Rosenof, *Realignment*, 78.

⁷⁰ Carmines and Wagner, “Political Issues and Party Alignments”, 67.

⁷¹ Ladd, 1990.

⁷² Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments*, 13.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 5.

engaging and influential.”⁷⁴ The proof, however, is not forthcoming, and, further, as he himself notes, two of the main theorists, Key and Sundquist, are cautious and not of a “maximally ambitious” bent. Mayhew, without reconstructing the theory he wishes to critique, is instead critiquing a collection of features from the straw man of a non-existent theory he has cobbled together. Carmines and Wagner call this a critique not of realignment, but of an “amalgam” of the literature, where Mayhew’s fifteen characteristics of realignment are symptoms or secondary expressions of realignment rather than fundamental features of the theory.⁷⁵ In particular Carmines and Wagner, following Rosenof, contest one of Mayhew’s main views that “periodicity” is a characteristic of realignment theory.⁷⁶ Reassembling partisan realignment – which Burnham in 2006 estimated had 500 solid publications to its name – is no trivial matter, but it is one that has to be addressed by anyone wanting to critique it.

Mayhew’s disgruntlement with theory is highlighted when he argues that to select patterns within history is itself limiting. He prefers that historians should stress much more the role of short term factors: the contingencies thrown up in a campaign and the strategy of the actors involved. He also suggests a better way to understand voters that cannot be accommodated by the idea of valence which notes the idea of trusting a party to do something – for example, look after the economy.⁷⁷ However, he concedes that historians must try to create some sort of framework for their story. His suggestions are war, race and economic growth as alternatives to the progressivist, class/dialectic view he sees being put forward by realignment theorists such as Burnham. Ironically the realignment thesis he attacks can be seen as an

⁷⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁵ Carmines and Wagner, “Political Issues”, 67.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁷⁷ Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments*, 149.

empirical alternative to a class perspective, where attachment to party is a watered down stand-in for a watered down version of class. One way to proceed in the understanding the 1930s, for example, would be to follow Samuel Lubell's point, a journalist whose work Key admired and recommended, who argued in 1941 that the New Deal had "drawn a class line across the face of American politics".⁷⁸

Some authors do maintain, however, that we might best interpret the electoral developments of recent decades as realignment. Campbell writing in 2006 argues, versus Mayhew, that there has been a staggered secular realignment to the Republicans starting in 1968. Campbell argues that "Republicans have registered durable gains in presidential voting starting in 1968"⁷⁹ and that on the basis that realignment is "a durable and substantial shift in the parties' national electoral balance of power", this should be considered a realignment.⁸⁰ He notes that some of the overall Republican success was hidden because of poor showings in congressional elections in the South that he sees as resulting from the lack of a Republican organisation there and which had only been rectified by 1994.⁸¹

Campbell may well be right that there have been Republican gains, but he is on weaker ground when he argues that this is sufficient information to constitute realignment. The questions to answer from a realignment perspective would be on what basis is this change built and is it of a deep and lasting character. The problem of meaning is manifest in his argument for the reason that 1968 should be seen as the year of the realignment: "the strongest equation is clearly the third. Equation 3

⁷⁸ Samuel Lubell, "Post-Mortem: Who Elected Roosevelt?", *The Saturday Evening Post*, 25 January 1941 cited in Rosenof, *Realignment*, 33; Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 34-41.

⁷⁹ James E. Campbell, "Party Systems and Realignments in the United States, 1868-2004", *Social Science History*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2006): 359.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 380, 364-365.

specifies 1968 onset regression with 1972 as the realignment onset...(adjusted R² of .33 versus .26 in table 3 (t+4))⁸²

What the particular variables signify is not relevant here, but that a difference between .33 and .26 stands in for a decision about an historic turning point. And as Daniel J. Gans, writing in 1985, argues such numerical distinctions of degree are inevitably arbitrary and subjective.⁸³ Gans himself takes up the whole idea of realignment by attempting his own simple test that might not be affected by any selection bias of numerical data and the particular analysis applied to it. Gans does a statistical analysis of runs of results in national elections from 1856 through to 1980 to determine whether it can be said that one election victory sets up a pattern of future elections. Other than for incumbent presidents, Gans finds no pattern statistically distinct from a random set of results. Gans strikes a useful note of caution about using statistics, but this is also seen in his own use of statistics because he has too simple a binary model. The difficulty here is that a critical election remoulds the opposition such that in Lubell's formulation the second party plays an orbiting moon to the main party's sun, so creating a situation, for example, where "we're all Keynesians now".⁸⁴

One of the great hopes for realignment and a reason it was taken up so widely was undoubtedly that it might mark a more scientific and objective approach to history. Writing in 1971, Thomas Jahnige, makes the explicit claim that V.O. Key Jr.'s critical

⁸² Ibid., 377.

⁸³ Daniel J. Gans, "Persistence of Party Success in American Presidential Elections", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1985), 221-237.

⁸⁴ The phrase "we're all Keynesians now" is often attributed to Nixon, though the phrase comes from Milton Friedman cited in "The Economy: We Are All Keynesians Now", *Time*, 31 December 1965. Although as baldly stated Friedman sees this as a one-sided representation of his view. See the letter to *Time* in response by Friedman, "Letters: Friedman & Keynes", *Time*, 4 February 1966, reproduced at <http://www.bradford-delong.com/1965/12/time-the-economy-we-are-all-keynesians-now.html>

election theory is an “empirically verifiable law analogous in physics to the gas law”.⁸⁵ For Jahnige this is important because previously historians failed to agree on even the periodization of the history they studied – their approaches to him seemed arbitrary. Here political science could approach the veracity of the natural sciences. Lichtman in 1976 argues that “critical election theory” could be seen as part of a wider move to incorporate the insights and methods of the social scientists that took place in US history since the mid-1950s. Lichtman notes the “common sense, honest preparation and individual preparation” of the traditional historical approach and contrasts the “formal models of man and society” and “quantitative methods” that have been brought into the discipline.⁸⁶ McCormick contrasts much of political history, where research focuses on particular people or events, with research such as that based on realignment which synthesises across locales and eras and uses both the theories of the social sciences and of quantitative statistical analysis.⁸⁷

Realignment theory has been able to provide a rough periodization of US history, though not definitive, that has provided an important starting point and framework for discussion between historians. Key’s paper has helped establish a broad sense of historical change and thus aided discussion and research. However in some of the literature there is an attempt to seek safety in numbers. The arguments in this chapter have hopefully shown that realignment, from Key on, works best not as a definitive set of statistics, but when used as part of a political and historical discussion that attempts to establish meaning.

⁸⁵ Thomas P. Jahnige, “Critical Elections & Social Change: Towards a Dynamic Explanation of National Party Competition in the United States”, *Polity* (1971): 466.

⁸⁶ Lichtman, 1971: 317.

⁸⁷ McCormick, “The Realignment Synthesis”, 85-105.

The waiting for realignment that comes with each election can seem like a straightjacket – even a waste of time. Although realignment seems to help create a sensitivity to change, when this becomes formulaic, the routine it involves might mitigate against a thorough search for new types of change taking place. Likewise the popular use of “realignment” in the media and political commentary more generally seems to have little meaning other than a large shift in support in a particular election – and so the overuse of this jargon, albeit used incorrectly, now acts to obscure rather than illuminate. The points we might best take from realignment theory – especially where it has long not worked its reorganising magic – are that political science missed the importance of the New Deal coalition because it saw the past repeating itself. Further there is a sense in realignment theory in the moment of change it most seriously attempted to capture in the 1930s that the ideas of the electorate can change.

The theory of realignment attempts to make change a central part of analysis. The idea that there would be realignments is, it might be argued, an attempt to make change part of the theory. However, the theory to make empirical comparisons of categories ends up being blind to the qualitative changes in these categories. The meaning of class and race change even as the numbers are totted up in the analysis. The way that the theory has retained importance over a number of years bears testament to the limitations of US political theory and to attempt to grasp the complex interactions between race and class.

Chapter 5. Negotiating Whiteness

If the previous chapter showed the surprisingly limited ways in which race has figured in the default understanding of US politics in the academy especially when it comes to an understanding of electoral change, this chapter begins a historical narrative which attempts to establish that race should be considered as playing a central role in the formation of modern US politics. Its starting point is not the racial outlooks of whites; rather it attempts to show the coming together of various strands of thought and of organising that developed a deepened racial outlook. Rather than treating race as set aside on its own, the chapter attempts to show how race plays a vital role in the negotiations of class, religion and nationality, and so how the late nineteenth century began a new period of racial organising. It provides an analysis of the interaction between questions of immigration, the position of newly emancipated blacks, evolving ideas of race and of class conflict. This will setup the following chapter which shows the mechanisms through which the racial approach created in this period extended into the twentieth century. Understanding the dynamics of the attempts to incorporate whites and the related exclusions of blacks and Asians is important because later developments play out in the context of the accommodations made in this period. The relatively uncontested physical separation of the races that takes place in the twentieth century begins to make sense given the political approaches discussed here.

This chapter works through a substantial number of years. It covers US history from the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century. To do this it adopts a thematic approach. In terms of sources it uses a series of substantial historical works

that cover a number of years and where necessary goes into some depth by drawing on specific investigations or material from the period.

The initial theme the chapter identified was a coming together of a group of political campaigns around race in the late nineteenth century following the civil war. The first campaigns were around the Chinese: the thesis draws on left wing commentaries on the trade union movement in the West and the success of the anti-Chinese campaigning.¹ The second campaigns were the reaction following the end of reconstruction and the attacks by the Democratic Party in the South on trade union organising, the Progressive Party and on black voters to undermine black gains.² The third campaigns can be grouped together as the nativist movement. The core of the analysis is the exemplary work by John Higham. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925*.³

The second theme of the chapter is the 1924 Immigration Act. The source for this is Ngai. Her analysis clearly marks out the connection between whiteness and being American expressed in the act. We use Ngai to explain how the Act undermines the nativist movement without removing all divisions and leaving racial ordering still at issue.⁴

¹ Jean Pfaelzer. *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans*. New York: Random House, 2007; Gwendolyn Mink. *Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development: Union, Party, and State, 1875-1920*. London: Cornell University Press, 1986.; Alexander Saxton. *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California*. London: University of California Press, 1971; Andrew Gyory. *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

² Carol A. Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³ New York: Athenium, 1974

⁴ Ngai, Mae M. "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924", *Journal of American History* (1999).

The third theme the chapter examines the interaction between ethnic conflicts among whites and the development of the New Deal. It connects FDR's concerns to an intellectual antecedent in Teddy Roosevelt drawing on Gary Gerstle's analysis.⁵ Roosevelt's concerns about the political instability around industrialisation and the fear of racial decline among whites is connected to the New Deal. It also uses Mike Davis's sensitivity to divisions in the labour movement between Catholics and Protestants. Davis helps chart the continuing difficulties of racial ordering and some of the impetus/political importance of breaking down the barriers behind different white groups.

The fourth theme is developments from the New Deal. Here Gerstle's work provides the spine for the discussion of race from the New Deal to the post-war period. While the thesis questions Gerstle's separation of civic nationalism and a racial nationalism, his work, nonetheless, very usefully brings together a great deal of relevant material around race in one place from this period in a clear form and with a strong timeline. Gregory and Sugrue are also useful in assessing the desperation blacks face in this period and the consequent importance of the New Deal despite its connection to the enhancing of spatial divisions between blacks and whites.⁶ It should be noted that there is no work in this period that directly sets out the contradictions within the New Deal.

⁵ Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁶ James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2009)

Race and Postbellum Reorganisation

In the late nineteenth century and with the dawn of the industrial age, race and racial thinking became central to the formation of US political constituencies. Race was used to create coalitions cutting across incipient class division. This happened not just in southern states where anti-Negro sentiment was mobilised but also in the West with the displacement of the Chinese population and also in the racial sorting applied to recent immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Through anti-Chinese mobilisation in the West, the Democrats, Republicans and trade unionists competed to establish support. Through racially framed responses to labour organising in the South, Democrats made some recovery from what they saw as the indignities of Reconstruction. Republicans legislated to exclude non-white immigrants from naturalisation and their strongly Protestant nativist base was more often than not at odds with new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe that began to arrive from the early 1880s. Agitation by labour and by the Populist movement in this period was stymied and countered by racial thinking and organisation, but was also crucially informed and promoted by a racial outlook.

Across the Pacific Northwest in the late nineteenth century there were around a hundred pogroms against Chinese Americans who were expelled from numerous towns and either scattered across the continent or returned to China. This was coincident with the arrival of European immigrants and those either demobbed or escaping economic downturn from the East in numbers.⁷ The major wave of expulsions of Chinese in the mid-1880s was facilitated by labour in collaboration with

⁷ Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007), xviii. The white population of California increased by 88 per cent from 1860 to 1870. Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, (London: University of California Press, 1971), 14.

small producers hostile to competition from large landowners that employed Chinese labourers. In one example, following debates in 1885 prompted by the setting up of a local Knights of Labor group – an early trade union grouping at the forefront of anti-Chinese campaigning – 500 local whites in the city of Tacoma in Washington state marched Chinese residents out of the city after giving them just four hours to pack.⁸ Expulsions followed from local exclusionary policies and attacks on non-white immigrants from China and Latin America from the mid-century centred in mining areas. In the 1880s the California state government came under the control of southern Democrats and proceeded to set special taxes and ordinances against local Chinese (and to limit the political freedoms of emancipated slaves).⁹ Even West Coast Jews were involved: the Anti-Coolie League met at the B'nai B'rith service each Friday in San Francisco.¹⁰ While in the 1870s about one in 10 Californians was Chinese, by 1902 Chinese made up less than 3 per cent of the population.¹¹

Saxton argues that the campaign for Chinese exclusion became part of national politics that undermined the black gains of Reconstruction.¹² The argument against unfair competition from the Chinese – organised under labour contracts sold by Chinese merchant companies to US employers – by association pointed to the threat of competition from newly emancipated but impoverished blacks and so began to make acceptable and rehabilitate Democratic arguments about the need to control black labour. The anti-Chinese organising in the West came to influence thinking in

⁸ Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreak in Tacoma, 1885", *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1954): 271-283.

⁹ Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, xxi.

¹⁰ Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, x-xxi.

¹¹ Roger Daniels, "Westerners from the East: Oriental Immigrants Reappraised", *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (1966): 374.

¹² Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (London and New York: Verso, 1990) cited in Noel Ignatiev, "The Paradox of the White Worker: Studies in Race Formation", *Labour/Le Travail*, Vol. 30 / Vol. 30e (1992): 237.

the East and those whites migrating West took up anti-Chinese politics in what Saxton argues was a feedback loop.¹³ The campaign against Chinese exclusion can be seen as growing out of the ideology of the time – the Indian wars had whipped up racial sentiment as had the war with Mexico, and, despite emancipation, the sentiment of white racial superiority predominated. However, the anti-Chinese movement then reinforced the predominant racial approach in politics.

The regional protests against the Chinese played a formative role in the shaping of the political outlook of unions – even on a national basis. Daniels notes that “As a rule it was the liberal rather than the conservative, the labor organizer rather than the employer, the proponent of change rather than the defender of the status quo who sparked and organized the first half-century of anti-Oriental agitation.”¹⁴ The Chinese were seen by many to be the tool of big business and monopoly interests used to undermine wages. According to Mink the use of anti-Chinese politicking “transposed anti-capitalist feeling with anti-immigrant hostility.” But the success of these mobilisations also “invigorated national union solidarity.”¹⁵ It made political goals relatively clear (the exclusion of non-white immigrants from competition in the labour market) and appealed to existing racial and national outlooks rather than negotiating the cleavages of class. In so doing it established an outlook based on the group identities of workers that was to plague the US union movement and to limit a general unionism of the type that appeared in Europe by bolstering craft unionism with racial and ethnic exclusiveness.¹⁶ The issue became, according to Saxton, a way for the unions which were predominantly of skilled or craft workers to “shortcut

¹³ Ibid., 237.

¹⁴ Daniels, “Westerners from the East”, 377; see also Ignatiev “The Paradox...”, 236.

¹⁵ Gwendolyn Mink, *Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development: Union, Party, and State, 1875-1920* (London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 72.

¹⁶ Ibid., 38; see for example Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class* (London: Verso, 1999), 41-45.

the pressure for radical reform” from the unskilled while also becoming a means to politically appeal to such workers who were the ones most in competition with the Chinese.¹⁷ The power of anti-Chinese campaigning was such that at times it had to be reined in. When, for example, the Workingmen’s Party of California formed in 1877 and led by Denis Kearney which used the slogan “The Chinese must go!” organised unskilled labourers and the unemployed against the Chinese, the craft unions were at pains to try to gain control of the party and isolate Kearney. The Democrats and Republicans too acted against Kearney by running a joint ticket in elections. The explosiveness of the anti-Chinese issue became part of the reason for the craft unions forming under the American Federation of Labor in 1886 on the basis of forswearing politics and pursuing a more “pure and simple” unionism without the wider political goals of the Knights of Labor. Democrats, Republicans and the other third party groupings that emerged could then promote anti-Chinese sentiment in a division of labour that left the craft unions undisturbed. As Mink argues, this retreat from external politics was being made by a trade unionism that was already politicised internally along the lines of ethnic/racial affiliations.¹⁸

We have stressed how the campaign for Chinese exclusion became politically important in the West and affected the craft unions’ relationship to politics on a wider basis. Nonetheless, it is worth injecting a note of caution about the relationship of these campaigns to the immigration legislation that was enacted and to question what this means in understanding workers outlook on race more generally. As early as 1875, the Page Act banned the entry of almost all Chinese women and in 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act banned Chinese immigrant labourers and disallowed

¹⁷ Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 264.

¹⁸ Mink, *Old Labor and New Immigrants*, 38.

Chinese immigrants from naturalisation (a law not overturned until 1943).¹⁹ Gyory notes that in passing these acts “Politicians not California, not workers, and not national racist imagery ultimately supplied the agency for Chinese exclusion.”²⁰ Further he argues that while white workers were racist, they were no more racist than other sections of society and, on a national level, workers largely showed indifference to the cause of exclusion.²¹ For Gyory, in an era of close party competition legislation for exclusion was the cause of politicians on a national basis to “deflect attention from genuine national problems, economic depression, mass poverty, and growing unemployment by magnifying and distorting a side issue of paltry significance into one of seemingly overriding national importance”.²² This is an important qualification for our argument because it was not an ingrained working class racism that set the Chinese as a distinct inferior race in legislation and established Chinese immigration as a national cause. Rather this was the politicians of the Gilded Age attempting to secure support by setting out a scapegoat. Here the opposition there was by workers to the importing of contract labourers might be distinguished from the machinations of Democrats, joined by the 1880s by many Republicans, eager to establish the Chinese issue as something that would work for them. The longer-term impact of these measures and the dispersing of the Chinese

¹⁹ Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, x. The 1882 Act was repealed in 1943, as China was an ally in the Second World War. The repeal still limited numbers – to only 105 per year. Only with the 1965 Immigration Act was large-scale Chinese immigration allowed. Harvard University Library Open Collections, “Immigration to the United States, 1789-1930”, n.d., accessed 16 April 2015, <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/exclusion.html>

²⁰ Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

population largely removed what had become in Saxton's words an "indispensable enemy" for the various political actors.²³

It should be noted here that that there was little counterweight to the racial outlook being expressed in this period in the ideas mobilised against slavery in the Civil War.²⁴ The war itself was not initiated against slavery as such (however implicit slavery is to the causes of the war). As Horton puts it "the important issue having been, for most white northerners, the preservation of the Union, rather than the abolition of slavery"²⁵, or stated more forcefully by Frederick Douglass the civil war was initiated *for* slavery, to ensure the slave states remained part of the union.²⁶ Saxton points out that there were three main intellectual currents at play that came to oppose slavery. The first, abolition, was based on a fundamental belief in equality and generally took a Christian form. The second, "free soil", was in support of new settlers working in the absence of competition from slaves. The third, the main outlook, "unionism", was opposed to slavery to the extent that it prompted the southern states to pursue a sectional approach which often ran counter to the national interest. The abolitionist banner was taken up in the war as the strongest and so most cohering condemnation of slavery when it became clear that an assault on slavery – as the economic underpinning of the South's power – was necessary. Lincoln for example took up the anti-slavery position in 1863, two years into the war. Of the three approaches only abolition explicitly proclaimed or required racial

²³ Later such groups as Filipinos, Mexicans and Japanese took on analogous roles though to a lesser degree. For example, Roosevelt in 1907 put in place the gentleman's agreement limiting Japanese immigration in the wake of campaigning in the West about Japanese influence and following the 1905 victory of Japan over Russia which brought into question the dominant position of white nations. However, a developed investigation of this is beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁴ Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 32-37.

²⁵ Carol A. Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 72.

²⁶ Cited in Ignatiev, "The Paradox...", 237.

equality. Indeed the “free soil” outlook easily resonated with hostility to Chinese employed as contract labourers, for example. Outside of the exigencies of war, the absolute appeals of abolition to the equality of man returned to being a minority approach. This became clear as early as 4 July 1870 in the discussion of the 1870 Naturalization Act. Charles Sumner, senator for Massachusetts, argued that the word “white” should be removed from the bill and therefore the prohibition of naturalisation by non-whites. Sumner appealed to the Declaration of Independence – “that all men are created equal” – but was roundly defeated 30 votes to 14 in the Republican dominated senate.²⁷

While in the West the Knights of Labor campaigned against the Chinese, in the South their approach was often to work across the colour line to organise both whites and blacks. The reasoning was that without the co-operation of the large numbers of black workers – who could not, unlike the Chinese, reasonably be expelled – employers would be in a position to divide the workforce. The Knights were not organising on the basis of equality: the default belief was one of white racial superiority. However, it was considered that the subordination of lower class whites was tied up with the suppression of the many black labourers. Moves by the Knights to work across racial lines were met with anti-negro hysteria and repression from local white militia in the South. The bloodiest dispute was in Thibodaux, Louisiana in 1887. The Knights of Labour organised the withdrawal of labour from the sugar cane harvest in response to wage reductions in a workforce which though mainly black also had white workers. The cane planters persuaded the Governor to bring in state troops to evict strikers from their cabins – a Gatling gun was even set up in the main square of the parish. The strikers were taken in by local urban blacks but a white

²⁷ Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 36-37.

defence committee, ostensibly following shots being fired in the direction of one of their patrols, removed strikers from these houses and executed at least 30 and as many as 200. In the process of race baiting and repression, the bulk of white strikers were peeled away from supporting the strike and the Knights of Labor driven out. As a consequence of this defeat rural labour disputes in Louisiana were muted until the 1950s.²⁸

Where the Knights of Labour foundered, just a few years later the People's Party, part of the Populist movement, tried again. In the 1896 election the People's Party promoted limited but nonetheless for the time radical forms of co-operation between poor white and black farmers and sharecroppers.²⁹ Tom Watson the Populist leader, writing in a newspaper editorial, described the race-based response to his campaign: "The argument against the independent political movement in the South may be boiled down into one word—NIGGER!"³⁰ In the elections of 1892, 1894 and 1896 the People's Party in the South was confronted by voting fraud, hostility and violence. In the 1892 election, for example, 15 Populist campaigners were killed.³¹ In the wake of the 1896 election defeat of the Populists, which put paid to the movement, from 1889–1908 the Democrats implemented new restrictions on voting based on poll taxes and literacy tests to target blacks – and many poor whites. This was followed with the attentions of lynch mobs to ensure that eligible blacks were discouraged from voting. Turnout in the South following restrictions on suffrage declined on average 37 per cent – 26 per cent among white voters and 62 per cent among

²⁸ Rebecca J. Scott, "Building, Bridging and Breaching the Color Line: Rural Collective Action in Louisiana and Cuba 1865-1912" in Theda Skocpol (ed.) *Democracy, Revolution, and History* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 151; Rebecca J. Scott, "Defining the Boundaries of Freedom in the World of Cane: Cuba, Brazil, and Louisiana after Emancipation", *The American Historical Review* (1994): 70-102.

²⁹ Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism*, 90-92.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

blacks – and voter registration in Louisiana, for example, for whites declined from about 164,000 in 1897 to 92,000 in 1904, while black voter registration declined from 130,000 to 1,300 in the same period.³² The racial divisions in the South then were not merely a continuation of slavery: it was from this defeat of the Populists through the question of race that the Democrats were in a position to forge the solid South.³³

Nativism

Racial dividing lines, though more fluid in this case, were also present in the divisions between the native white population and ostensibly white immigrants. The situation of the Irish that came to the USA in the wake of the Irish potato famine in the 1840s showed the process of incorporation of immigrants into the existing racial order was not as straightforward as such immigrants simply being recognised as white or designating themselves so. Indicative of these difficulties were several cartoons of the period which depicted the Irish with simian, brutish features and linked them to either blacks or Chinese or both.³⁴ With little capital and from predominantly rural backgrounds the Irish fleeing the famine were, in the main, only slotted into the division of labour in low skilled service jobs or else in the most difficult and dangerous manual employment. In some cases, for example, Irish navvies were employed in work that was rejected for black slaves as being too likely to cause damage to the slaves who were valuable property.³⁵ Roediger argues that in the 1840s there was popular support among Irish immigrants for the emancipation of slaves with whom they shared the lowest rungs of society. However, by the 1850s

³² Ibid., 114, 114f78.

³³ Ibid., 113.

³⁴ Thomas Nast Cartoons, “Tag Archives: Irish and Chinese”, undated, accessed 1 August 2016, <https://thomasnastcartoons.com/tag/irish-and-chinese/>

³⁵ David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (London, Verso: 2008), 148.

Irish immigrants had come to see their best hope for advancement to be in distancing themselves from blacks and black labour rather than in solidarity. This was shown, for example, in the New York waterfront campaign for an exclusively Irish workforce and to exclude the small numbers of blacks employed there. The New York Draft Riots of 1863 saw the Irish not simply opposed to the draft but also to their positioning alongside blacks more generally. The riots became the occasion where “white workers enacted their desires to eradicate the working-class black male presence from the city”³⁶ – attacking not just individual blacks but black businesses and even a black orphanage. Though at the bottom of the pile, the possibility of taking on more fully the status of being white through attacking blacks held greater promise, it seemed, than attempting solidarity with blacks.

Nor was the negotiation of whiteness straightforward for the later immigrants from the 1880s on. Roediger discusses the racial epithets of “guinea”, “greaser” and “hunky” applied to recent immigrants during the period of nativist agitation that questioned the extent to which these immigrants were fully white. He notes that the Irish, having taken on board the necessity of being accepted as respectable Americans, provided a model of incorporation and the personnel of politicians, policemen, teachers, priests and foremen that judged and regulated new immigrants.³⁷ Davis argues that the religious divide became central here and that for Catholic immigrants this amounted to a parallel system of acculturation in a militantly Protestant country based around the relatively liberal American Catholic Church that came with the Irish. In political terms this meant Catholic immigrants found a place in the culturally laissez faire Democratic Party in an “unholy alliance” with the backward

³⁶ Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago: 2003), 284.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 155-158.

agrarian South.³⁸ It should be noted here that there was another countervailing trend towards the maintenance of existing ethnic identities. The division of labour was such that new immigrants used their ethnic connections to carve out a place within particular industries. Glazer and Moynihan, for example, detail how in New York City over time various ethnic groups were able to develop a niche within the working life of the city in particular areas of employment that provided some shelter from wider labour competition.³⁹

The main political response to these “strangers in the land”, as John Higham referred to them⁴⁰ took the form of the nativist movement. It focused on the differences between a settled American population – often emphasising their Anglo-Saxon or Northern European origins – as against the perceived disruptive force of new immigrants. This reaction set such immigrants intrinsically apart and so was central in the placing of immigrants within a racial order, but it cannot be reduced to simply a racial outlook. Starting from the early 1800s the various outpourings of nativism were episodic and far from stable and drew upon concerns of nation, religion, political radicalism and morality as well as race. Higham’s definitive survey of nativism from 1860 to 1925 identifies three strands to the nativist approach that waxed and waned over time: anti-Catholicism, anti-radicalism and racial nationalism.⁴¹ The response to a perceived immigrant problem also differed between the regions. For example for much of the early periods of nativism the nativist banner was taken up in the South and the West only at the high water mark of nativist agitation. Overall, the pattern was that the strength of such nativist campaigning varied inversely with the

³⁸ Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 24-26.

³⁹ Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970).

⁴⁰ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York: Athenium, 1974).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5-11.

confidence in the nation's prospects – and so its perceived ability to incorporate these immigrants into the existing polity.

The wave of immigration from southern and eastern Europe that began in earnest in the 1880s, especially when combined with economic downturn, set the pattern for the bouts of nativist campaigning that spilled into the first two decades of the twentieth century. However, it should be noted that during several periods nativist agitation was quiescent. The Civil War, for example, where half a million immigrants took up arms for the union had, at least for a time, largely subsumed nativist/immigrant divisions. As Higham argues for most of the immediate post-Civil War period there was optimism about the prospects for integrating new immigrants – at times the idea of the US as a mongrel nation made up in the mix of immigrants was celebrated. Later on the imperial ambitions floated at the end of the nineteenth century with victory in the US Spanish War saw a temporary optimism about being able to bring what were seen as lesser peoples into the fold.⁴²

One important strand of nativism was anti-radicalism. The disruption of labour radicalism brought with it a nativist reaction and at times fused it with a racial approach. Recent immigrants, it was argued, were particularly prone to radical ideologies. A race-based approach to immigrants developed more systematically in reaction to anarchist and later socialist activities. In particular the Haymarket Affair of 4 May 1886 was illustrative. The incident was at a rally in Chicago's Haymarket Square mainly of German immigrants against an employer lockout. When police attempted to clear the square, anarchists bombed policemen and then the police fired into the crowd and a riot ensued. Four anarchists were later hanged for the bombing. The political response to the bombing and to the radical politics involved

⁴² Ibid., see chapter 2 and chapter 5.

took on an explicitly racial form. Subsequent commentary raised the delinquent racial character of immigrants and linked this to support for radical politics. An editorial in the business journal, *The Age of Steel*, raised the prospect of being overrun by the “communistic and revolutionary races”. The *New York Sun* argued the bombers were “foreign savages” as different from the respectable working man as are the “Apaches of the plains”. The *Chicago Tribune* pointed to aliens abusing the country’s hospitality. An article in the *Labor Compendium* that year discussed the “danger that the hot-blooded races, emotional, savage, and clannish, would submerge in a sea of kerosene the old Saxon solidity and granite.”⁴³ The radicalism of anarchism or of socialism, then, was painted as un-American – as alien to citizens of a republic formed from Anglo-Saxon individualism based on property rights. In the nativist approach this counterposed a native population with a stake and belief in existing property rights to newcomers who might seek to redistribute property. To the various property owners might be added those native workers seeking to differentiate themselves or retain their differentiation from new immigrants seen as potential competitors. The expression of the material and political differences in racial terms appealed to contemporary notions of racial superiority and acted to cohere potential conservative forces against radicalism defining it as outside of the national/racial polity. Here anti-radicalism might become a test both of racial and of national soundness.

In the early twentieth century, racial concerns began to solidify taking an increasingly “scientific” form expressed in the eugenic approach.⁴⁴ In particular the anxiety, first elucidated in scholarly circles, was that the quality of immigrants was dragging down

⁴³ Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism*, 103-104.

⁴⁴ See Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 150-157; Hofstadter, Richard. *Social Darwinism in American Thought 1860-1915*, Revised Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955 [1944]).

the native stock and precipitating “race suicide”. The native “Anglo-Saxon stock”, it was argued, was well suited to traditional rural life but less so to urban industrial capitalism and had become demoralised by competition with immigrants, supposedly much more comfortable with urban squalor. Consequently many natives were loath to bring children into the world. By 1907 Theodore Roosevelt, then President, described race suicide as the “greatest problem of civilisation”.⁴⁵ Fears of racial degeneration were such that they were taken up as a rationale for breaching a laissez faire approach and became important justifications not just for immigration controls but also for labour reforms such as working hours and minimum wages legislation. This was on the basis that weaker races that might subsist on the low wages they could command should be discouraged by enabling employers to choose candidates with stronger racial characteristics.⁴⁶ The immigration act of 1907 showed how eugenic concerns worked alongside the racial casting of radicalism. The act combined an outlook to strengthen the racial characteristics of the nation together with an opposition to anarchist politics by prohibiting immigration by the sick and feeble-minded but also by anarchist sympathisers. While Gerstle’s influential history of race in US development brings out two major strands in political thought – of a civic nationalism and a racial nationalism – in this period, at least, this division often breaks down. The civic and the racial aspects of nationalism could merge both in the nationalist/racial opposition to radicalism and in the racial basis for civic national development.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Thomas C. Leonard, “Retrospectives: Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (2005): 209.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 212-215.

⁴⁷ See Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Such was the concern that at the level of government, a more formal attempt to negotiate a response to these new immigrants was set up in 1907 in the shape of the bipartisan Dillingham Commission (or the United States Congress Joint Immigration Commission). After four years, in 1911, it submitted its 41 volume report with detailed statistical analysis to Congress – the largest report ever submitted at that time – as an attempt to appraise these newcomers.⁴⁸ The commission worried about the sheer numbers of immigrants and their offspring especially concentrated in parts of the country and recommended some form of literacy test for new immigrants. Its recommendations were, however, buried in the prevailing business consensus that the US still required a steady stream of new labour.

The First World War starting with the rearmament drive to supply the British heightened the sensitivity towards ensuring that the USA's foreign born population were sufficiently attached to the nation. Predictably there were scares around the loyalties and activities of those of German descent, but the war effort also came with a campaign to win over the loyalties of recent immigrants more broadly. The Americanisation movement starting from 1914 harnessed the crusading energies of civil society increasingly backed by federal agencies in a programme of civic classes, patriotic meetings, Liberty Bond drives and a general outreach to immigrant communities taking the form, for example, of home visits: "to go among our alien residents and to see that they understand the desirability of becoming citizens [and appreciate] the debt they owe to the country which is protecting them."⁴⁹ With US entry into the war the movement shifted towards more strident demands for becoming fully American. The cry was that each should be "100 per cent" American

⁴⁸ Dillingham, William P., Reports of the Immigration Commission, (Washington: US Government, 1923), available at <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007470983>

⁴⁹ Cited in Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 245-256.

and forswear previous national ties. For example former President Theodore Roosevelt speaking to the largely Irish Catholic Knights of Columbus at Carnegie Hall on Columbus Day 1915, argued that “There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else.”⁵⁰ Roosevelt was cheered to the rafters by his audience following a pattern of Irish determination to show they should be considered fully loyal and part of the nation. The stridency of such demands is also captured in President Woodrow Wilson’s final address in support of the League of Nations in 1919:

I want to say – I cannot say too often – any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic whenever he gets ready. If I can catch any man with a hyphen in this great contest I will know that I have got an enemy of the Republic.⁵¹

Rather than concluding with the Armistice, the Americanisation campaign buoyed by its wartime success spilled over into peacetime. The need to pull together had limited the coercive aspect of the war-time campaign.⁵² However, with the Red Scare of 1919 that came in the wake of the Russian Revolution, the “100-per-centers” felt no such inhibitions. A network of volunteer organisations, acknowledged by state agencies, looked to root out internal dissent: striking workers and radical groups were attacked and dispersed and radicals lined up for deportation – though federal

⁵⁰ “Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated”. *New York Times*. 13 October 1915, accessed 16 April 2015, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9901E0DD1239E333A25750C1A9669D946496D6CF>

⁵¹ Woodrow Wilson, “Final Address in Support of the League of Nations”, *American Rhetoric*, 25 September 1919, accessed 16 April 2015, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wilsonleagueofnations.htm>

⁵² John Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 224.

law limited the scope for such deportations to be carried through especially with naturalised citizens,.

In the early 1920s the Red Scare abated but merely made way for other nativist themes to re-emerge. Higham notes that the patterns of nativism in place prior to the war – anti-Catholicism and racial nationalism with the rationalisation of eugenics – reasserted themselves but with a greater energy, arguing that the strength of organising came with the combination of a post-war economic slump, the restarting of immigration and the moral reaction to the law-breaking that came with prohibition.⁵³ In rural areas these conditions made Protestant fundamentalism into a significant force. Higham denotes this fundamentalism as “the characteristic response of rural Protestantism to the disillusion following America’s international crusade. The wartime hope for a new and beatific world produced nothing but crime, moral chaos, and organised selfishness on a grander scale than before.”⁵⁴ On the back of such sentiment a new Ku Klux Klan – formed in 1915 – grew in strength enough so that from 1920 to 1924 it terrorised rural America, attacking Catholics and policing local morality, and built significant bridgeheads into regional politics.

The 1924 Immigration Act

The nativist agitation that followed the war meant that from 1917 until 1924 “state and national governments legislated almost ceaselessly against the successive dangers that seemed to arise from America’s foreign population.”⁵⁵ The Immigration Act of 1924 or the Johnson-Reed Act became the culmination of the political response to the difficulties of assimilating new immigrants into a conservative

⁵³ Ibid., 265-266.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 293.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 300.

consensus. The strength of the nativist movement was such that it overcame traditional opposition by business to curbing the supply of new labour and steamrollered opposition by immigrant groups. The act set immigration quotas based on an annual limit of 2 per cent of the national origins of the US population in 1890 – in a period before the immigration that it found contentious affected the country’s demographics.⁵⁶ The bill was strongly informed by a eugenicist approach. The “star witness” for the drafting of the 1924 immigration bill was the eugenicist Harry H. Laughlin who in November 1922 provided a report to Congress finding much greater degeneracy among new immigrants than native stock.⁵⁷ And in passing the bill “[r]acialist language and eugenicist principles permeated discussion on the House and Senate floor.”⁵⁸ It should be noted, however, that while the use of the 1890 census was implicitly aimed against those immigrants from recent decades the sponsors of the bill took pains to avoid making this argument explicitly.⁵⁹

In controlling immigration and limiting that immigration to whites, the racial category of white was solidified and made distinct from the ethnic/national backgrounds of European immigrants. This ultimately created a basis for resolving tensions between a native white population and white immigrants. As Ngai argues the Immigration Act of 1924 established racial categories where previously ideas of race and nation had been used more loosely. While, on the one hand, the law had an implicit ranking of Europeans based on national origin; on the other, the law established a common white American race through the exclusion of others:

⁵⁶ 85 per cent of immigration quotas were for northern and western European nations as of May 1924. Mae M. Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924”, *Journal of American History* (1999): 67f1.

⁵⁷ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 105.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ For the convolutions involved here see Higham, *Strangers in the Land*.

Euro-Americans acquired both ethnicities – that is, nationality-based identities that were presumed to be transformable – and a racial identity based on whiteness that was presumed to be unchangeable. This distinction gave all Euro-Americans a stake in what Matthew Jacobson has called a “consanguine white race” and facilitated their Americanization. But, while Euro-Americans’ ethnic and racial identities became uncoupled, non-European immigrants – among them Japanese, Chinese, Mexicans, and Filipinos – acquired ethnic and racial identities that were one and the same. The racialization of the latter groups’ national origins rendered them unalterably foreign and unassimilable to the nation.⁶⁰

For Ngai the Act set the “legal foundations for social processes that would unfold over the next several decades, processes that historians have called, for European immigrants, ‘becoming American’ (or, more precisely, white Americans), while casting Mexicans as illegal aliens and foredooming Asians to permanent foreignness.”⁶¹ At the same time as the 1924 Act marked out national/racial differences, the reduction in immigration also paved the way for a more relaxed approach to incorporating former southern and eastern European immigrants and gave space for efforts from those immigrants to mark themselves out as fully white.

With the success of the bill in shutting down immigration from eastern and southern Europe – although the basis for the quotas was in dispute as late as 1929 – eugenics lost much of its impetus as it was the “eastern and southern European peoples eugenicists deemed racially inferior”⁶² Further by the 1930s eugenics was undermined first by scientific critiques that dismissed, for example, the viewpoint that

⁶⁰ Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law”, 70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶² Leonard, “Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era”, 219.

might see “feeble-mindedness” as a simple genetic trait and later by its association with Nazi racial ideology. With the bill came the end of the storms of nativist energy, but also the end of the open welcome to the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore” that Emma Lazarus wrote of in the more optimistic circumstances of 1883.

The Great Migration and Race in Northern Cities

While European immigration became a national focus for discussions of race, internal migration in the First World War brought out that a reservoir of hostility towards blacks was national rather than only being a feature of the South. The Great Migration of Southern blacks to the North was in response to growing war production. Over 3 million new manufacturing jobs were created in the war industries and immigration had fallen from 1.2 million in 1914 to only 110,000 in 1918.⁶³ Migration north was not only by southern blacks: many more whites from the South moved to the North in search of a better life – a similar pattern to the later migration of the 1940s. However, while whites from the South were dispersed more widely black migration created distinct communities in Northern cities. When blacks attempted to move outside of these enclaves they were greeted with violence. For example, in Chicago between 1917 and 1921, 58 homes were bombed to deter movement away from black areas.⁶⁴ As Gregory describes there was a concerted and organic/voluntaristic effort to police the boundaries of the black ghettos:

Various tools were used to confine African American housing options. Real estate brokers and neighborhood associations organized the market, using

⁶³ James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 24.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 101, p101f38.

housing covenants and zoning ordinances to back up the informal system of racial exclusion. Violence was the key. In Detroit and every other city where the new ghettos took shape, whites used terror to keep African Americans in the black belt. Dynamite greeted many of the families who dared buy property in a white neighborhood. Hundreds of houses were damaged or destroyed by bombs or fire in the 1920s in cities across the North.⁶⁵

A campaign along similar lines to that pursued by the Irish, who in the 1860s attempted to expel any trace of blacks from alongside them on the New York dockside, had spread out across the Northern cities and become a cause for multiple white ethnicities and nationalities. It seemed that the pressures of the racial order were such that hope of acceptance and assimilation required the literal distancing from migrating blacks. Likewise the return of blacks who had served in the First World War, less accepting of their place in the racial order, sparked conflict. The “Red Summer” of 1919 at the height of the Red Scare was part of a year of violence and lynchings that swept across both the South and many Northern cities.⁶⁶

While the wartime expansion had accommodated an expansion of black employment, the post-war downturn and in particular the onset of the Depression showed these gains to be contingent:

the Depression showed that the rules of race in the North meant that African Americans participated in the labor market as a reserve force, eligible to fill in

⁶⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁶⁶ Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2011).

the lower ranks only as far as the supply of white workers and the power of hostile unions allowed.⁶⁷

In employment, as in housing, it was evident that in the USA blacks remained a race apart.

The New Deal and Race

The New Deal, at the same time as being a response to the Depression, was also the building of a coalition of support made up of “city dwellers, workers, ethnics, Catholics, Jews, blacks, intellectuals who favored governmental activity, and the solid South.”⁶⁸ Previously the Democratic Party might have been seen as a sectional party. The Democrats had become a home to many Catholic immigrants in the Northern cities – and the sons and daughters of those immigrants – as something of a buffer to the moralistic campaigns of Republican nativists. Together with support in the South opposed to the party of Lincoln, the Democrats had as its base those groups opposing the forces of big business and modernisation represented by the Republicans. The broad measures enacted to counter the Depression and the “grand coalition” assembled, however, saw the Democrats applying a national approach that transcended the previous nativist/immigrant divisions. The equal recognition implicit in the equality in relief had the overall effect of accelerating the process of incorporation of recent immigrants more fully into the American mainstream.

In some ways FDR’s measures were the seeing through of proposals made earlier by his political hero and distant cousin Theodore Roosevelt. In 1912 Teddy

⁶⁷ Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 98.

⁶⁸ Bernard Sternsher, “The New Deal Party System: A Reappraisal”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (Summer 1984): 54.

Roosevelt previously Republican president formed the Progressive “Bull Moose” Party. This initiative built on the idea of a “New Nationalism” that applied state intervention to resolve social problems and sought especially to reach out to recent immigrants at the sharp end of industrial development. It was argued that “social rights” were required in the face of the grinding poverty that albeit free people would face in industrial capitalism.⁶⁹ While the New Deal was more pragmatic and ad-hoc than these previous proposals, in the extremis of the Depression it began to cohere a coalition of interests that saw simply carrying on as before as unrealistic and that could look to a new social contract that included, and so developed a base of support in, the urban working class consisting in large part of ethnic minorities, in a way that echoed Teddy Roosevelt’s earlier initiative. The extent to which FDR’s electoral success was initially bolstered by the new votes of the sons and daughters of recent immigrants, totalling some 26 million by 1930 (the first and second generations combined made up 40 million and approximately one third of the white population)⁷⁰ or else by converted Republicans is the subject of on-going academic dispute – and which we discuss elsewhere. However, by the election of 1936 it seems clear that there was a base of support for the implied social contract that came with the New Deal and that reached beyond old loyalties in Roosevelt’s offer for a “more equitable opportunity to share in the distribution of national wealth.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 67.

⁷⁰ In 1930 there were approximately 26 million second generation immigrants, their parents numbering 14 million. The total national population was approximately 126 million in 1930. In 1930 4.7 per cent of the total population were aliens i.e. not naturalised – approximately 6 million people. See Richard Weiss, “Ethnicity and Reform: Minorities and the Ambience of the Depression Years”, *The Journal of American History* (1979): 567.

⁷¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago”, 2 July 1932, The American Presidency Project, accessed 16 April 2015. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=75174>

One way in which the New Deal politics seemed perhaps to test the political arrangements of race and ethnicity framed by the 1924 Immigration Act was in industrial relations and labour reform. The 1930s saw industrial militancy highlight the divisions between different groups of whites and take organisational expression through union groupings. Legislative support for union rights – as employees’ “right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing” – came with the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 (NIRA) and should be seen as connected to Roosevelt’s ethnic white supports. As well as dealing with labour the act included a programme of public works and the rationalisation of industry through the sanctioning of co-operation and the management of production to alleviate the deflation that went with competition and oversupply. The labour relations clause prompted the outpouring of pent-up frustrations at the petty injustices workers faced in US industry and a massive growth in trade union membership, the bulk of which was composed of second generation immigrants.⁷² Davis describes the wave of strikes that took place from 1933-1937 as “arguably the highwater mark of the class struggle in modern American history”.⁷³ The strikes were spearheaded by radical shop committees and left-wing radicals. The Communist Party played an important role in these disputes. Its organisational effectiveness combined with its base within new immigrant communities: in 1930 in the USA it published eight foreign language *daily* papers.⁷⁴ The institutional trade union expression of this upsurge came with the formation of the CIO as a grouping of unions within the AFL in 1935. Davis’ detailed history of US trade unionism, written from the left, argues that the CIO in the early years represented the “capturing” of an increasingly radical movement by a well-

⁷² Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 55-56.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 57f7; Communist Party membership went from 14,000 in 1933 to 27,000 in 1935.

connected grouping of trade union bureaucrats which blunted worker's demands and ensured limits were put on the radicalisation that was taking place. The CIO was helped by the 1935 National Labor Relations or Wagner Act which established the National Labor Relations Board as a means of labour mediation.⁷⁵

The wave of trade union militancy which culminated in a series of sit down strikes in 1937 began to falter in 1938. Many commentators stress the role of Roosevelt's sympathetic handling of the CIO – which he began to look to as an ally when the “second New Deal” had begun to alienate business – in calming the situation. However, an additional, but related, factor was the divisions within the trade union movement itself. In 1938 the CIO had become too radical for the AFL and was expelled. The split saw a revival of right wing unionism within the AFL and a “civil war” between the CIO and AFL. The AFL worked with business to try to establish “sweetheart” deals to keep the CIO out and opposed whichever political candidates the CIO supported. Part of the motivation for the AFL was undoubtedly in trade union leaders defending their bureaucratic position. However, as Davis argues, this “*ancien regime* ultimately drew its solidity from the relative conservatism of its predominantly skilled, native-Protestant and ‘old immigrant’ membership” influenced by “a profound middle-class counter-reaction to the CIO and the growth of the left.”⁷⁶ Here Davis is referring to the predominance of native Protestants and of workers from the established old immigrant populations from Ireland and Germany in the skilled unions as against the more recent immigrants from southern and eastern European countries that made up most of the unskilled workers e.g. Polish, Italians, Slovaks, Hungarians etc. The ethnic division of labour, of the skilled and

⁷⁵ The NIRA was ruled as unconstitutional in 1935 on the basis that it represented too great an intrusion of government into private affairs.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

unskilled, was reflected organisationally in the AFL-CIO split and in the political anti-radicalism of many AFL workers.

The ethnic divisions among workers continued to test the unions in this period and these divisions had important political repercussions. However, here, we must distinguish between the difficulties between white ethnicities, i.e. ethnic differences and racial divisions. Politically the 1924 immigration act prefigured a combined white racial identity that ultimately transcended such conflicts. It should be noted that though in the sense of industrial militancy Davis is right that there is a high water mark of unrest in this period. However as regards politics more widely by this stage workers had a connection to an identity around whiteness such that industrial militancy in the main did not transcend the assumption of a shared white racial identity overall.

New Deal measures might also be seen to test racial arrangements in the South. The South was hit particularly hard by the Depression and so the New Deal, which acted both to stabilise agricultural prices and to provide relief to farmers, welcomed by Southern leaders. Initially care was taken by the administration that federal action in agricultural areas in the South was channelled through state and local agencies. This meant that initially, at least, such programmes did not bypass or directly challenge the existing political arrangements i.e. federal intervention was done in such a way as not to undermine the peculiar Southern institutions of segregation. But the labour question more generally was important here. The South's reliance on cheap labour meant the decentralised programmes made pains to exclude agricultural and domestic labour from New Deal programmes – whether black or

white.⁷⁷ The administration's attempt to bolster agricultural prices – in effect through the restructuring of agricultural production – had a devastating impact on many Southern agricultural workers and sharecroppers:

When the New Deal administration attempted to raise commodity prices starting in 1933 through the Agricultural Adjustment Act program of crop reduction, more rural livelihoods were lost. Landowners took their poorest fields out of production and told sharecroppers and tenants to leave. By the mid-1930s, rural distress in some parts of the South was every bit as serious as the urban version.⁷⁸

The settled incorporation of the South, and its particular demands, in the widened electoral coalition was temporary, however. The 1936 election campaign saw events that would point to the later divisions in the Democratic Party between Northern and Southern factions based on race. One factor was the removal of the effective Southern veto on presidential nominations. In 1936 the Democratic Party abrogated the rule that presidential candidates had to be supported by two-thirds of delegates. Removing the rule had been floated in 1932 but only with Roosevelt's second term looming was there the political capital to see it through.⁷⁹ The implications were not seen clearly at the time in the enthusiasm to get Roosevelt nominated but the changes signalled that the party both sought to move beyond its sectional past and that support for the institutions of segregation could not be taken for granted.⁸⁰ A

⁷⁷ Howard L. Reiter, "The Building of a Bifactional Structure: The Democrats in the 1940s", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 116, No. 1 (2001), 114.

⁷⁸ Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 29.

⁷⁹ See Harold F. Bass, "Presidential Party Leadership and Party Reform: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Abrogation of the Two-Thirds Rule", *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2. (Spring 1988): 303-317.

⁸⁰ The chairman of the Democratic Party convention's Committee on Rules said "the Democratic Party is no longer a sectional party; it has become a great national party" cited in Robert A. Garson, *The*

second factor was that white Southerners, now less numerically significant to the expanded Democratic vote overall, were “jolted by the fact that for the first time in history, black voters turned from their traditional moorings and overwhelmingly backed the Democratic ticket” – in other words black votes for the Democrats meant that segregationists faced the prospect of having to compete for influence with black electoral power in the North.⁸¹ For those attuned to a detailed reading of the polls, the bi-year congressional elections of 1934 had already intimated the growing importance of black votes in key swing Northern constituencies – something that became clearer in later elections.⁸²

Rather than simply resulting from the Democratic Party reaching out to blacks, the realignment of the black vote might rather be considered as a “leap of faith”. Confidence in Roosevelt’s support for civil rights was limited and his courting of the Southern bloc set limits on any measures that might be forthcoming. As late as the 1936 election the Democrat platform held nothing for blacks specifically. However the New Deal had extended help to the black population. The sheer levels of black poverty, even if relief and employment opportunities were unevenly distributed, meant that many blacks benefitted from federal programmes: for example, “[b]y 1935, in the mid-Atlantic region, which included New York, a remarkable 55.6 percent of black families received relief because they were so destitute” and, during the course of Roosevelt’s first two terms, black federal employment had increased from 50,000 to 150,000.⁸³ The reforms of the second New Deal starting in 1935 had

Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, 1941-1948 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 7.

⁸¹ Reiter, “The Building of a Bifactional Structure”, 114-115.

⁸² Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 259; See page 117 on the numbers and concentration of blacks in particular cities.

⁸³ Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2009), 21, 51.

even seen the arrival of the Works Progress Administration and the related National Youth Administration in the South.⁸⁴ While the previous southern New Deal initiatives had tended to exacerbate black poverty, the WPA set aside part of its budget for relief for blacks. And symbolically the “Negro Cabinet” – the name given to the Federal Council of Negro Affairs – was set up in the mid-1930s, although this was an advisory body rather than having true cabinet level status. Franklin Roosevelt said little in support of blacks, however the First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt played an important role in highlighting civil rights.⁸⁵ Usefully for FDR, this division of labour in the first family was mirrored by criticisms on race being directed by Southern opponents against Eleanor rather than FDR himself – who remained relatively untouchable.

The overtures made to blacks and a reaction to some elements of the “second New Deal” that extended federal intervention coalesced in opposition to Roosevelt in the shape of an informal “Conservative Coalition” from about 1937 and despite Roosevelt’s overwhelming victory in 1936. Southern segregationists had no natural home outside of the Democratic Party and Southern leaders were also attuned to the popularity of Roosevelt and the relief that came with the New Deal among many of their constituents. As John Temple Graves remarked, for many Southerners Roosevelt was “the Democratic party, the rebel yell, Woodrow Wilson and Robert E. Lee rolled into one.”⁸⁶ However, with the interventions by New Deal supporters, such as the union drives by the CIO in the South and especially following Roosevelt’s attempt to pack the Supreme Court with members that would support the extended New Deal, southern Democrats increasingly began to oppose those elements of the

⁸⁴ Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 256.

⁸⁵ Garson, *The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism*, 66.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12

New Deal that infringed on their political arrangements. The reaction to Roosevelt did not, however, directly take the form of a defence of Southern institutions. Rather the criticism applied was one of freedom from federal interference.⁸⁷ In his study of Democratic voting, Reiter shows how overall in the Senate, Southern Democrats remained more liberal than their Northern counterparts until 1941-1942 with rightward swings in the 1937-1938 period and in 1941-1942. In Congress the pattern is a steadier rightward drift from 1933 and southern congressional Democrats becoming less liberal than northerners in 1937-1938.⁸⁸ Later, even in the midst of war, two sides of the Roosevelt coalition became more apparent. In June 1943 the Conservative Coalition, over a Presidential veto, passed the Smith-Connally Act which sought to halt wartime strikes and banned direct union contributions in political elections. This prompted the CIO to form a political fund, the CIO Political Action Committee (CIO-PAC). The Smith-Connally Act prohibited election contributions, but the CIO-PAC was able to act in the primaries where despite the formal forswearing of political alignment the fund acted to support the more liberal of the Democratic candidates even helping to unseat some of the strongest segregationist supporters. However, the bulk – almost two thirds of the CIO-PACs funds – went into voter registration drives.⁸⁹ The registration of black voters in the South further hardened opposition in the South that shortly after the war would show the rifts within the Democratic coalition.

On a broader note, the 1930s saw a slackening of tensions between nativists and others brought with an opening up of the polity to philo-ethnic positions. Together with the growing ideological competition with the National Socialists in Germany this

⁸⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁸ Reiter, "The Building of a Bifactional Structure", 113.

⁸⁹ Joseph Rosenfarb, "Labor's Role in the Election", *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Fall 1944): 378-380.

brought on a change in the intellectual climate such that by the middle of the 1930s race was increasingly being discussed in cultural terms. In the 1920s the word “culture” was a technical term used in specialist areas of academia. However students of Frank Boas’ work in anthropology had become influential. Following Ruth Benedict’s 1934 work *Patterns of Culture*, “it was scarcely possible to graduate from an American university without being exposed to discussion of racial differences in cultural terms”.⁹⁰ In 1933 Boas brought together intellectuals to counter Nazi racial theories who determined to take-up the racial outlook that lay behind Nazi propaganda.⁹¹ The Hollywood machine also began to play a role in combatting fascist ideas. In 1936 Columbia pictures produced *Legion of Terror* which recounted the attempts of a Klan type group to impose dictatorship on a small mid-western town. In 1937 Warner Brothers brought out *Black Legion* which recounted how a fascist-style organisation stirred up racial hatred using anti-immigrant sentiment wanting “a united nation of free-white – one-hundred per cent American”. The film’s critique of nativism reflected the intellectual temper of the times as the 1915 epic *The Birth of a Nation* had previously. These changes meant that when Churchill visited Roosevelt in the Winter of 1941 with the intent of invoking an alliance of the Anglo-Saxon peoples, Roosevelt explained to Churchill that this no longer applied, that American was composed of many nationalities and that Churchill should go away and read Louis Adamic’s recently published *Two-Way Passage*.⁹²

⁹⁰ Weiss, “Ethnicity and Reform”, 571. On other important publications that saw race through the prism of culture see Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 192.

⁹¹ Weiss, “Ethnicity and Reform”, 571-572.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 568-569

World War Two

Just as the interventions of the New Deal seemed to be losing efficacy and the economy seemed set to stagnate, rearmament for the Second World War prompted state intervention that would have been inconceivable previously. While government interference in what were seen as the affairs of business was increasingly being countered by Congress, the demands of war and the business friendly nature of these arrangements meant that the wartime measures went unhindered. The cost plus contracts of the war drive put industry to work and growth in production and the demand for labour were sudden and immense. Despite the enormous demand for workers, blacks were often being excluded from the new employment: "In October, 1940, only 5.4 percent of all United States Employment Service placements in twenty selected defense industries were nonwhite, and even this figure fell to 2.5 percent in April, 1941."⁹³ It took the threat of a march on Washington monument, to take place in July 1941, and so the embarrassment of open racial strife in the midst of the war effort against an enemy espousing racial theories to get Roosevelt to respond. The executive order was given that employers and unions should "provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries" regardless of race, and the Fair Employment Practices Committee was set up to investigate complaints with the possible sanction of cancelling contracts. This order was symbolically important as "for the first time since Reconstruction a president had made open cause with civil rights groups" and, further, this was done by a Democratic president in the face of his Southern constituency.⁹⁴ Subsequent attempts to side-line the FEPC and limit its budget proved ineffective. While discrimination often remained, in several cases the FEPC exposed and implemented

⁹³ Garson, *The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism*, 19.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-22

measures to allow black workers employment – and some advancement – in the war industries.

While a lever was applied to loosen the grip of race on employment practices in industry, the armed services remained segregated. At this time any pressure for desegregation would be insufficient as against the considerations of potential disruption that such desegregation might cause among whites in the military. The segregation was applied almost systematically and, in particular, there were limits on the extent to which blacks might play a direct role in combat:

Throughout the war, all branches of the military remained largely segregated. Black and white GIs trained, served and socialized separately from each other. Proportionately far fewer black servicemen than whites, whether in the infantry, tank corps, air corps, navy, or Marines, were allowed to engage in combat; when they did, they almost always fought in all-black units commanded by white officers.⁹⁵

The military even segregated its blood supply to ensure that blood transfusions did not breach the colour line.⁹⁶ The petty indignities of the armed services at times prompted near rebellion from black soldiers under the ministrations of their often Southern officers and, for example, there were race riots between black and white troops stationed in the UK – with many whites objecting to the racial intermixing between black GIs and British women.

For blacks in the military Southern racial practices predominated; however for whites the war became a mechanism through which the importance of ethnic difference

⁹⁵ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 203.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 203.

might be seen to be overcome in the fraternity of battle. Importantly this was reflected by Hollywood's portrayal of the war, forming part of the propaganda effort. Gerstle lists a "partial roster" of ten Hollywood war films from 1943 to 1945 featuring the multicultural armed forces and emphasising the co-operation and comradeship as (white) Americans – the stock "trinity" of characters being Protestant, Catholic and Jew.⁹⁷ Only one film from this list features a black character and then for all of ten seconds. This was in the 1943 film *Sahara* that has a Sudanese fighter who is part of an international grouping and was situated firmly outside the race relations of the US forces.⁹⁸ The war effort and its propaganda in effect pointed towards a common whiteness, even if in ethnic and religious diversity, working through the framework established by the 1924 immigration act.

The Spoils of War

Victory in the war and a resurgent US economy brought with it measures to spur the economy by aiding the returning troops. As with the relative positions of whites and blacks in the military these were unevenly dispensed. The 1944 Serviceman's Readjustment Act better known as the GI Bill or the GI Bill of Rights is described by Sacks as "arguably the most massive affirmative action program in U.S. history" as "it was aimed at and disproportionately helped male, Euro-origin GIs" and was "decidedly not extended to African Americans or to women of any race."⁹⁹ Between August and November 1946, fully 39 per cent of African Americans as opposed to 21 per cent of white soldiers received dishonourable discharges denying them rights

⁹⁷ Ibid., 204-205.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 208.

⁹⁹ Karen Brodtkin Sacks, "How Did Jews Become White Folks?" in Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek eds., *Race* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), ⁹⁹.

under the GI Bill.¹⁰⁰ Some 20,000 black ex-GIs were able to attend mainly black colleges on the back of the bill by 1947, but some 15,000 were turned down.¹⁰¹ The way was being made for women to move out of the expanded workforce for jobs for the returning men. Posters depicted women swapping overalls for make-up – as a return to previous identities. However, with discriminatory hiring policies still rife there was no such identity to return to for those blacks that were expelled from the extended wartime workforce as the war came to an end.

This chapter has attempted to establish the case for understanding the negotiations of race as being central to the development of the modern US political system. Rather than seeing race as a function of slavery or else a feature of the South, it has sought to make the case that race becomes important for reasons specific to the late nineteenth century which are important on a national basis. The picture we have attempted to paint is of how race became a way to assuage conflict around religion, ethnicity, nationality and class. Such an approach might be understood to have been trialled in the 1850s in the accommodations sought by Irish immigrants and subsequently set out most clearly in the 1924 immigration act. Race figured not simply as hostility to blacks, but rather a political project of establishing a common white polity. The next chapter attempts to show how this political project developed. It looks at the mechanisms whereby it grew out well into the twentieth century and took on a material form through the coming together of whites and their growing physical separation from blacks.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 92.

Chapter 6. Racial Separation

In the previous chapter we examined how a range of considerations based around race shaped the early development of what we would recognise as the modern US political system. In this chapter we develop this argument by looking at the mechanisms through which the impact of racial thinking and organisation extended into the twentieth century. In particular we attempt to show how ideas of race took on a material form through the geographical separation of blacks and whites and how this impacted on the post-war political organisation of the USA. From patterns of segregation, we then examine how attempts to tackle civil rights through confronting formal discrimination were ultimately limited in the face of the material separation that took place. This chapter allows the thesis to move beyond an analysis based simply on the racial outlooks of whites.

One key source in this chapter is Loewen. Loewen's work does not primarily discuss the development of suburbia – the main way that whites were separated from blacks – but his original research brings out events that were otherwise forgotten. The exclusion of blacks from thousands of small towns in the USA helps the thesis in substantiating the timing of anti-black sentiment and the form it took in exclusion on a national basis from the 1890s until the 1940s.¹ The core of the chapter, however, uses the work on suburbanisation by Kenneth T. Jackson.² This is supplemented by works looking at detail in the operation of federal housing initiatives by Hillier.³

¹ Loewen, Sundown Towns James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, (New York: New Press, 2005).

² *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)

³ Hillier, Amy E. "Redlining and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation", *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2003).

Material on the informal racial distancing by whites is more patchy and comes from several sources.

The chapter makes use of a number of sources in attempting to undermine a series of misunderstanding about race and the South. It makes a great deal of use of several “revisionist” scholars on the South.⁴ These help the thesis bring into question the narrative of the southern strategy and the Southernisation of racial politics and the idea that the South provided a racial blueprint for the rest of the country through Republican machinations. Dudziak helps explain further how the reaction to race retains a focus on the South and is partially directed by the imperatives of the Cold War. Russell is useful in bringing into question the idea of the middle class civil rights movement and its connection with blacks in the South.

We start by revisiting briefly the period discussed in the previous chapter. We argue that while there might seem to be a continuity in the second class status of blacks, the period from the end of Reconstruction until at least the 1940s should be considered a particular low-point in race relations that had important long-term consequences. As described in the previous chapter there was a period of reaction developing from the later nineteenth century and, as we will go on to discuss, this sets the background for a growing geographical divide between blacks and whites. This separation is at the same time a racial consolidation of whiteness in the coming together of different European ethnic groups. While there is something of a melting pot for European ethnics, blacks are excluded from this process. The hostility towards blacks is such that it takes on a systematic physical aspect in the

Hillier, Amy E. “Spatial Analysis of Historical Redlining: A Methodological Explanation”, *Journal of Housing Research*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2003).

⁴ See Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (eds.), *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010)

geographic and spatial disassociation of the races. One example of this separation has recently been demonstrated in research on the expulsion and exclusion of blacks that took place during this period in small-town America.⁵ However, it is predominantly through the process of, what Loewen calls, “whites-only on purpose”⁶ suburbanisation that both the exclusion of blacks and the consolidation of whiteness was played out. One consequence of these divisions was that despite the prolonged post-war economic expansion that might perhaps have helped facilitate the incorporation of blacks into mainstream American life, African Americans were shut off from participating from the most dynamic developments that became increasingly concentrated in the suburbs. This meant, for example, that the white picket fences of comfortable suburban existence that became associated with the American dream in this period were predominantly for whites. The massive scale of suburbanisation and the attempt of suburban communities to distance themselves from the problems of the cities and blacks, who became associated with these problems, created what has been called an “American Apartheid”.⁷ A pattern of attempting to keep “undesirables” out of suburban enclaves spurred on by racial animus subsequently created a suburban politics that becomes part of a fragmented polity that has consequences extending beyond race relations and which is discussed in the next chapter.

From the perspective of the treatment of blacks over a great deal of US history, at least until the 1960s, there is a strong argument that there has been continuity. Over an extended period of time blacks have faced discrimination and been seen as

⁵ In many ways this is part of a “hidden history” of racial discrimination and exclusion that has only recently been unearthed.

⁶ Loewen favours this particular turn of phrase. James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, (New York: New Press, 2005).

⁷ Douglas S. Massey, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

second class citizens. Writing in 1965, for example, John Hope Franklin surveyed the racial divisions in the USA from 1619 to his present day and argued that such were the divisions in the USA there had been in effect “two worlds of race”.⁸ Franklin could show evidence of widespread hostility, with occasional indifference, towards blacks throughout the period he examined. Although there were organisations in the white population that campaigned against slavery and some for equal treatment under the law, and even the impetus of the opposition to slavery of the Civil War, mobilisations supporting full formal equality were ultimately episodic and limited in scope. Crucially, argues Franklin, there was little forthright support in the USA for the idea that blacks were the equals of whites: the “ambivalence on the crucial question of equality has persisted almost from the beginning”.⁹ Franklin draws out how assumptions that whites were superior and blacks deficient were not merely the preserve of the South but constituted the default outlook both North and South. For example, even some Northern anti-slavery societies balked at having free blacks as equal members of their organisations. As Litwack argues, looking at the period 1790-1860, before the Civil War in the Northern states blacks were commonly denied the franchise, faced segregation in churches, schoolrooms and theatres and the parties competed to “outdo each other in declarations of loyalty to the ante bellum American Way of Life and its common assumption that this was a white man’s country in which the Negro had no political voice and only a prescribed social and economic role”.¹⁰

The prevalence of hostility across parties and across states towards blacks goes some way to account for the invisibility of race as a subject of political analysis in academic writing for most of this period. We will return to this point when looking at

⁸ John Hope Franklin, “The Two Worlds of Race: A Historical View”, *Daedalus* (1965): 899-920.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

the relationship between the party political competition and race. However, it is worth noting here that the bi-partisan assumptions on the position of blacks meant that racial outlooks as regards blacks were ubiquitous, but at the same time seemed to have little political consequence: the constancy meant that such racial outlooks did not seem to reorient or redirect the polity. Indeed race was often factored in as personal, psychological or group/cultural prejudice that, strictly speaking, lay outside the remit of political investigation. Overall this meant that for extended periods race was neglected in academic inquiry in the political sciences. Similarly, whiteness was taken as an assumed category and so its formation and development not interrogated until much later. In a survey of the position of race in US political science, Hutchings and Valentino note that academic interest in the role of race follows its perceived political importance more widely. In the study of the US political system scholarly enquiry has a “peculiar history” when it comes to the study of race, paying little attention to the subject until the 1960s with the rise of the Civil Rights movement.¹¹

In our analysis, however, we have attempted to show that despite the aspects of continuity, race played a particularly important role in the creation of the modern US political system. From the late nineteenth century well into the twentieth century it shaped political organisation and campaigning, and featured heavily in the contest for loyalty and identity, especially with recent European immigrants. In this argument we draw on several scholars who have attempted to interrogate the idea of whiteness such that race cannot simply be seen as a matter of the relationships of the mass of whites with blacks. So, for example, as central a phenomenon as the

¹¹ Vincent L. Hutchings and Nicholas A. Valentino, “The Centrality of Race in American Politics”, *American Review of Political Science* (2004): 363.

New Deal coalition had important cohering imperative along racial lines where immigrants from many nationalities might be treated together as white.

The Extended Racial Nadir

As we have noted, the racial thinking that coheres a white identity comes with the negative sorting of other races. In particular this can be understood as meaning a particular low point for blacks in the period from the late nineteenth century stretching into the twentieth. Rayford Logan calls the period from 1877 through to 1901 “the nadir” for race relations in the USA. Logan looks at the political retreat from support for Reconstruction, the “betrayal of the negro”, and identifies cultural distain and hostility towards blacks in the literature of the period. He argues that in the nadir the support for equality becomes minimal.¹²

However, there is a strong case to be made that the nadir lasts beyond 1901 and has consequences lasting well into the twentieth century. One recent study presents evidence that the racial low-point identified by Logan carries on to at least the 1940s.¹³ Loewen’s pioneering 2005 research uncovered a pattern of racial expulsion and exclusion throughout the Northern US states in the form of “Sundown Towns” where the presence of blacks was forbidden after nightfall.¹⁴ The name “Sundown Towns” comes from the practice of posting signs at a town’s outskirts warning blacks that they must not be present after dark. Loewen’s study was prompted by curiosity about why, unlike his childhood town in Illinois, several nearby towns had no resident

¹² Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (Boston: First Decapo Press, 1997). The term “racial nadir” comes from the book’s original title.

¹³ Logan does not cover the period from 1901 in great detail. However he describes 1901 to the start of the First World War as a “low, rugged plateau”, *ibid.* 343. In this period there is activism by blacks and a reduced tendency for racial language in the press. However, for our purposes these features are secondary to the continued drive for whites to distance themselves from blacks.

¹⁴ Loewen, *Sundown Towns*.

blacks. His investigation found a “hidden history” of racial exclusion in these towns and further evidence for thousands of examples across the USA – with the notable exception of the Deep South where blacks were integrated into the workforce as low-paid agricultural labour. Starting around 1890 and peaking in 1940, white populations of small towns drove out resident blacks. The expulsion and exclusion of blacks generally happened with little or no documentation and was established informally – although it was sometimes described locally as an ordinance. Such exclusions peaked in Democrat controlled areas but were by no means limited to these areas. Blacks were driven out either by violence, often on some law and order pretext, or in some cases by a town simply refusing any interaction with blacks who sought to live there. Where violence and other discriminatory measures might be used in the Deep South to keep blacks down, in other states it was used to keep them out. Loewen notes that contrary to received wisdom until at least 1890 there had been a widespread dispersal of black families in limited numbers throughout rural America in small towns outside the South. From the 1890s onwards, in what Loewen calls the “Great Retreat”, there are thousands of examples throughout small town America of the ousting of black residents. This pattern is seen in the census results showing a rapidly dwindling number of black residents in small towns and documented by interviews with residents that corroborate the campaigns and measures to exclude black residents. The blacks excluded from these small towns either took up residence in ramshackle satellite dwellings or, more often, contributed to the growing populations of blacks in the major Northern urban centres.¹⁵

This research is particularly important for our purposes. It gives a clear empirical measure of how views of race, hardened in the late nineteenth century, had

¹⁵ Ibid., chapter 3.

important national consequences for the relationships between blacks and whites as the twentieth century developed. The small-town racial organising in this period is not simply to be found in the South, or straightforwardly in the vestiges of slavery. The growing black/white racial separation comes alongside the back of the racial sorting and consciousness we discussed in the previous chapter on a national basis. And as we will see this was not merely a small town phenomenon. Racial thinking is such that it shaped policy and the separation of populations to a large extent without contestation.

The Suburban (White) Melting Pot and the Spatialization of Race

We have already looked at what might be understood as important aspects of the racial nadir of the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century. However, ultimately the most powerful movement that came out of the nadir was the way in which race took on a geographic form through the peculiar patterns of suburbanisation starting in the early part of the twentieth century and lasting until the 1970s. The scale of this internal migration was such as to ultimately eclipse the scale of both the immigration prior to 1924 and the movement of blacks to Northern cities in the 1930s. This suburbanisation was strongly influenced by racial considerations and ultimately bolstered such racial outlooks. We now turn to look at how this happened in some detail.

In the 1930s and following World War Two, mass migration to the suburbs backed by federal intervention further effaced the distinctions between whites as the various European ethnicities came to live alongside one another in identical suburban plots. Over an extended period of time this helped erode the political importance of white ethnic distinctions. In part this was because fewer lived where the urban political

machines of the Northern cities held sway and which were organised in part through ethnicity and national origins. But this was also because the particular economic and political problems they faced as a result of coming from immigrant backgrounds, that created strong support for the New Deal, were no longer such pressing concerns. The problems of the city previously experienced came to seem remote for those that moved as too increasingly did the problems of being accepted as fully American as faced by prior generations. As we discuss in more detail in the next chapter, by the 1970s there was little distinction between whites from different ethnic backgrounds. The collective memory provided by city communities and local organisations dissipated with these communities. While whites came together in the suburbs, blacks were largely excluded from suburbanisation. Federal mortgage intervention together with private sector lenders who preferred all-white suburbs and the hostility of many whites helped create near universal segregation in housing throughout the USA. As whites and industry moved out of the central cities they left behind large pockets of urban decay and blacks, still city residents, became associated with urban problems.

Suburbanisation, though, did not start in the 1930s. In some ways it marks the development of the US economy and the bringing into play of technical achievements to bring more spacious and better living conditions to large numbers of people. Even by the end of the nineteenth century several factors combined to enable the better off to move out of crowded inner-city conditions in a pattern not seen in Europe. The rapid deployment of a network of electric street cars from the 1880s, themselves built with an eye towards property speculation; a new type of house construction, the balloon-frame method using a light timber frame developed

in Chicago in 1833 and still in use today¹⁶; and the enormous supply of land available in the USA meant that:

By 1900 the center of the city had become an area of office and commercial uses that was almost devoid of residences. Nearby were the grimy factories, and just beyond them the first tenement districts of the poor, the recent immigrants, and the unskilled, persons unable to afford even the streetcar fare and forced to compete for housing space where real estate was most expensive and housing the least desirable. Along these same streets, the well-to-do had lived only two generations earlier.¹⁷

The initial waves of suburbanisation did not result in new political/administrative entities. Early suburbs were swallowed up either through consolidation or often annexation into metropolitan areas and became part of the expanding cities. However, increasingly in the twentieth century residents of new suburbs, especially around the established cities of the North and the West, rejected municipal government because of the desire to distance themselves from urban problems both material and moral.¹⁸ Judicial presumptions in favour of annexation faded alongside the growth of this local opposition. Even with the growth of these breakaway suburbs this was not initially overly detrimental to the central cities: most work was still located in or around the city core and with the radial spokes of the street cars, the city remained the hub, the centre-point, of activity. Fittingly Chicago invented both cheap construction for suburbia and the skyscrapers where many suburban residents worked. However, with the mass take-up of the motor car this began to

¹⁶ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 124-127.

¹⁷ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 137.

¹⁸ For at least part of the complicated picture of how this worked see: Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 148-156

change. The lateral movement between suburbs for work became possible and road haulage meant that increasingly industry could take advantage of cheap land by relocating outside of the city. Previously rail transport allowed warehousing, which requires a large amount of land, to move outside the city at an early stage, and the expanding car production of Detroit was located at the intersection of rail lines, but road transport increased the options for a great variety of businesses.¹⁹ Later with major road building programmes in the 1940s, in particular with the interstate network, there was little barrier to the suburban relocation of business and because workers increasingly lived in suburbs this itself became an important motivation for business to up-sticks to suburban locations.

Between the wars there was a rapid expansion of housing, much of it in suburban lots, enabled and spurred by growing automobile ownership: between 1922 and 1927 there were on average 883,000 new houses built each year and by 1920, 46 per cent of the population were homeowners.²⁰ However, with the Depression, housing starts collapsed by 95 per cent of their previous level and defaults on housing loans became a national problem. In an attempt to stabilise the situation the Roosevelt administration created the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933. The HOLC created a national system of appraisal as the basis for refinancing loans and so to stabilise property values, and gave loan relief through a million low interest mortgages from 1933 to 1936.²¹ The appraisals worked by assessing the local area as the most important aspect of a property's value – and likely future value

¹⁹ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 113; Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration, "Suburbanization Historic Context and Survey Methodology: I-495/I-95 Capital Beltway Corridor Transportation Study", Vol. 2, 1999, accessed 16 April 2015, <http://roads.maryland.gov/Index.aspx?PageId=214>

²⁰ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 175.

²¹ Amy E. Hillier, "Redlining and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation", *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2003): 394.

– above that of the construction of the property. The HOLC mapped areas based on a survey of the occupation, income and ethnicity of the local residents creating four grades, the lowest grade being “D” or “hazardous” and marked in red. In this appraisal there was a strong bias towards reading an area’s racial profile as determining the security of its residential assets: “even those neighborhoods with small proportions of black inhabitants were usually rated fourth grade or ‘hazardous’”.²² Nonetheless the HOLC applied its own assistance to these hazardous areas²³ and also limited the distribution of its maps on the grounds that they might be misinterpreted as suggesting that no loans at all should be made to “hazardous” properties.²⁴ Hillier argues that the HOLC was applying, though perhaps more systematically, assessment practices that were already widespread in the private sector from the 1910s. Documentation for lending practices on the basis of racial criteria has been found in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Miami and Los Angeles.²⁵ The hostility faced by those blacks able to raise the funds necessary to move to white areas in the 1920s discussed in the previous chapter broadly supports the point that private discrimination was at play. It seems reasonable to conclude that discrimination by private lenders was already widespread as “[r]efusing to lend to certain areas, particularly those with African Americans, was such common

²² Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 201.

²³ Hillier, “Redlining...”, 397.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Following the 1919 race riot, the Chicago Commission on Race Relations found blacks facing significant barriers to securing mortgages and in 1932 the Mortgage Conference of New York shared block level maps discouraging lending in black areas (the group was disbanded following a successful civil injunction against it on anti-trust grounds in 1948). Researchers have unearthed maps for racial categorisation for institutions other than the FHA in Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Miami. See Amy E. Hillier, “Spatial Analysis of Historical Redlining: A Methodological Explanation”, *Journal of Housing Research*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2003): 143 and Hillier, “Redlining...”, 398.

practice that apparently few people found it remarkable during the 1920s and 1930s.”²⁶

In 1934 the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) was created to provide inexpensive credit to enable mortgage financing to take place through a system of state backing of private mortgage provision. This aimed to resuscitate the building trade as an important source of employment and to revive the mortgage market. The FHA worked with the HOLC in setting its own assessment model to the extent that the same letter grades were used in its own initial mapping including the section ““D” grade²⁷ – but it also applied these assessments to limit the underwriting of loans and thus made credit either unavailable or only available at significantly higher rates for housing to blacks or else in areas with a black presence. Again, the extent to which the FHA was simply applying standards already common in the private sector is unclear but the backing of the FHA in mortgage provision became in itself a significant factor. As the assistant secretary at a building and loan association in New Jersey noted, “The most desirable lending areas are considered to be those having the approval of the F.H.A., and in all probability no loans will be made in areas not approved by that agency.”²⁸ The FHA also spread its method of assessment through the publishing of *The Structure and Growth of Residential Neighborhoods in American Cities* in 1939, in its widely disseminated *Underwriting Manual*, and in working closely with the various private agencies involved in the housing market.²⁹ According to Jackson this meant that well into the 1960s the FHA “enshrined [segregation] as public policy” through “allow[ing] personal and agency bias in favour of all-white sub-divisions in the suburbs to affect the kinds of loans it

²⁶ Hillier, “Redlining...”, 398.

²⁷ This was the case in maps in 1935 at least. See Hillier, “Redlining...”, 403.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 403.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 403-404.

guaranteed – or equally important, refused to guarantee.”³⁰ The ministrations of the FHA together with the bias for all-white locales in the private sector did not just mean squeezing off credit for blacks, it also meant that buying a property in the suburbs became often significantly cheaper than renting in the cities for whites that could take up the offer and thus contributed to the exodus from the cities. With the outflow, the low valuations given in areas with a black population became a self-fulfilling prophecy.³¹ The Veterans Administration, created in 1944 to provide housing for 16 million returning troops, followed the prescriptions of the FHA and so enhanced the discriminatory effect of FHA policies following World War Two. The FHA also followed on from the private sector in approving the use of racial covenants which stopped properties from being sold to blacks – indeed it recommended them in its *Underwriting Manual*. The Supreme Court ruled in 1948 against these covenants – narrowly that they could not be enforced in law. However, only in 1949 did the FHA announce it would not back mortgages with such covenants as of February 1950 which gave builders notice that they should put these covenants in place before the prohibition was enacted.³²

Federal intervention incentivised mass white flight from urban centres and played an important role in supporting the creation of all white suburbs often out of the break-up of white ethnic neighbourhoods. FHA intervention also prioritised the type of private sector single family occupancies available in suburban areas. The FHA approved financing on single family dwellings over multiple-family occupancies by a rate of 4 to 1 and financing was not extended to accommodation built for rent by

³⁰ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 213, 207.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

³² *Ibid.*, 208.

either public bodies or by non-profit corporations such as co-operatives.³³ White ethnics, then, decamped to near uniform plots and housing leaving behind their old communities. Sacks describes her own childhood experience of starting in a Jewish enclave of the city where once moved to the suburbs the children brought together from a mixture of old neighbourhoods mixed and played together as white. Different religious or ethnic backgrounds became the subject of occasional childhood teasing rather than as previously the cause of a separate existence.³⁴ In this suburban white melting pot, old allegiances could seem increasingly remote. In passing we note here that in addition to indirect measures based on federal backing for mortgage finance there were some more direct initiatives by the state associated with whites-only housing. According to Loewen, FDR saw through the creation of seven whites-only towns as part of the New Deal.³⁵

Where finance was available there were other obstacles to sales to blacks which demonstrate the crabgrass-roots nature of opposition to racial mixing in housing. Up until 1950, Article 34 of the code of ethics for the National Association of Realtors stated "A Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood." The clause was changed to read: "A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or use which will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood." However

³³ Ibid., 206.

³⁴ Karen Brodtkin Sacks, "How Did Jews Become White Folks?" in Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek, eds., *Race* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 27. It should be noted that especially in some of the more well to-do suburbs there were continued proscriptions against Jewish occupancy, see Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, chapter 5, section "Keeping Out the Jews".

³⁵ Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 130. These are by Loewen's estimation: Richland, Washington; Boulder City, Nevada; Norris, Tennessee; Greendale, Wisconsin; Greenhills, Ohio; Arthurdale, West Virginia; and Greenbelt, Maryland.

Laurenti, writing in 1960, noted that “most realtors seem to understand the rewritten article in the same sense” and that local real estate boards also maintained constitutional clauses similar to the earlier version in the national code – and enforced them on pain of exclusion.³⁶ A 1955 Masters research project asking realtors in San Francisco about sales to non-whites in white neighbourhoods found a third of respondents cited an important motivation against facilitating such sales was fear of being boycotted for further business. However, the bigger factor mentioned by half of respondents was that sellers themselves refused to sell to non-whites. Asked whether, when a seller agreed to sell to a non-white, what their response would be, 85 per cent said they would try to avoid brokering the deal.³⁷

We have looked at some of the mechanisms of racial separation fuelled by a racial approach both at federal and local levels. However it should be noted that separation becomes more than simply a matter of racial bias especially over time and can develop an entrenched – even self-reinforcing – character. As the movement, or potential movement, of blacks to an area undermines house values this itself became a powerful motivation for opposition to allowing blacks to move in independently of the outlook of white residents. Thus the market acts as an important mechanism to discipline against integration. Further because of the relative poverty of most blacks, rather than simply being a matter of racial discrimination their association with very real economic and social problems means that a “rational” rather than racially biased motivation for discrimination may apply. As an economist discussing continued racial effects in housing credit argues:

³⁶ Luigi Laurenti, *Property Values and Race* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 17.

³⁷ Laurenti, *Property Values and Race*, 17-18.

Our analysis suggests two reasons why race effects will not disappear in urban credit markets simply because bigotry (personal discrimination) is eliminated. First, ..., personal discrimination is not the only category of economic discrimination. Rational and structural discrimination need not be fuelled by personal animus.... Second, personal and rational discrimination lead dynamically to structural discrimination. Slightings against agents with equal resources, over time, create agents with unequal resources. This legacy would remain even if the bigotry fuelling it had died out.³⁸

We should note here that the idea of “bigotry” as “personal discrimination” discussed above would be interpreted more expansively as a racial outlook based not on personal psychology but rather connected to a racial political outlook.

Or as Crowder argues because race is linked to other social, cultural and economic circumstances (i.e. those blacks that might move to an area are poor and disadvantaged) these circumstances themselves rather than racial hostility to blacks in general can become important reasons to avoid residence in areas with black populations:

To the degree that neighborhood racial conditions are linked to other social and economic conditions, the mobility of Whites from these areas may reflect the desire to avoid residence in neighborhoods with unstable populations, large numbers of poor residents, weak ties between neighbors, or other deleterious

³⁸ Gary Arthur Dymski, “The Theory of Bank Redlining and Discrimination: An Exploration”, *The Review of Black Political Economy*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1995), 59.

social and economic conditions, rather than an aversion to living near minority group members per se.³⁹

An additional difficulty for blacks was that it was often economic problems that prompted large scale black migration. In particular one of the main periods of black migration to Northern cities took place in the 1930s with the collapse of Southern agriculture. Here, in particular blacks were moving from the Southern recession to a North likewise mired in Depression. The economic difficulties helped ensure that blacks could not follow the pattern of ethnic advancement into an expanding economy that generations of Euro immigrants had experienced.

Overall, the racial divisions in the North took on a seemingly spontaneous character seemingly distinct or at least distanced from an overt racial political orientation. In other words, racial divisions seemed to be based on individual choices rather than the type of overt political or legal measures seen with Jim Crow in the South. Despite federal involvement, this might be considered as being “discrimination” as a choice, a preference, a matter of taste, rather than discrimination understood in its political or legal sense. This meant that in some ways the racial divisions of the North had a more organic and spontaneous character that could be more difficult to address and in some ways was more entrenched. While the more overt forms of racial organisation in the South were countered through campaigning for legal reform to achieve formal equality, what seemed to be the choice not to mix – as associated with, for example, “white flight” – was not so straightforwardly a political question.

³⁹ Kyle Crowder, “The Racial Context of White Mobility: An Individual-Level Assessment of the White Flight Hypothesis”, *Social Science Research*, Vol. 29 (2000), 226.

Moreover, over time, from the 1950s and into the 1960s and 1970s, the movements of racial suburbanisation seen in the North were transplanted to the South. As Sugrue argues:

The fact that northern racial reconstruction had also reached a climax and that both white capital and white people were fleeing the major northern cities added to the Sun Belt reversal. The incentives and aversions that drove companies and the white middle class out into the suburbs encouraged some to move farther, finding in low-tax and non-union southern spaces the ultimate refuge from northern big-city racial, fiscal, and union politics.⁴⁰

The pattern of the “spatialisation”⁴¹ of race through racial suburbanisation was to an extent copied in the South coming to partially replace previous forms of overt and legal discrimination of blacks and whites living in close proximity. For example, the city of Atlanta was more segregated in 1970 than in 1940. Again, this pattern was encouraged by federal funding. In the post New Deal period state expenditure on defence and infrastructure went disproportionately towards the South and West rather than to the North and East and towards suburban and rural areas rather to the North Eastern cities. Defence spending played an important role in California, Texas and Washington D.C. and the highway system laid the basis for suburban interconnections.⁴² Overall, however, the legacy of black concentration in Northern

⁴⁰ James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press: 2005), 39.

⁴¹ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past”, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (2005): 1244.

⁴² Robert O. Self and Thomas J. Sugrue, “The Power of Place: Race, Political Economy, and Identity in the Postwar Metropolis”, in Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *A Companion to Post-1945 America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 21-22.

inner cities was so great that “by 1990, twenty-four of the twenty five most segregated metropolitan areas in the United States were in the North.”⁴³

At the start of the twentieth century much of the American city would have been divided up into enclaves. Various immigrant groups would have concentrated their numbers to leverage the benefits of community, ameliorate the problems of language and pursue an ethnic niche in the division of labour. Over time, especially with second and third generations, success or opportunities would have led to some dispersal into the wider city – eventually integration would follow. Friends and family having made the transition out of the ethnic ghetto would provide a model to others. With the expansion into the suburbs, with access to cheap good quality housing and a booming economy this process was accelerated. The immigrant story of success and becoming American was the staple of the American dream. While this was significantly easier for white European ethnics, this way forward was possible for Latinos and for the smaller numbers of Asians. However, for blacks this transition was barred. In this process blacks became renewed and fixed as a race apart. A racial politics may have been behind many of the measures that limited opportunities for blacks, expressed both by individuals and in state and federal policy. However over time, the inequalities faced by blacks became more than simply a matter of racial politics – was not simply reliant on such racial prejudice – but rather became a structural reality. In other words the second class position of blacks informed the reaction to blacks. The depths of these divisions go a long way to explain the difficulties of dealing with race through legislation and for civil rights to address patterns of discrimination outside the formal practices in the South.

⁴³ Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 520.

In the twentieth century, race in the USA, we have argued, not only acted to sort people politically, but also came to sort the population geographically – race took on a material character. The outlook developed in the long racial nadir and in the consolidation of whiteness, and backed by racially loaded federal intervention, influenced patterns of racial separation largely through suburban migration. The separation took on something of an entrenched character such that blacks in this period became increasingly a race apart. A racial apartheid was created not primarily through legal mechanisms, but rather through seemingly spontaneous choices. The market in housing acted as the means through which choices to separate were expressed and reinforced by movements in house prices. The most dynamic growth took place around the suburbs and gave added weight to such divisions. Many of these choices were no doubt influenced by racial prejudice. However, as divisions consolidated, rational discrimination could increasingly work independently of direct racial bias through responses to price movements at least partially based on broader considerations of economic and social difference. Thus while the mechanisms of Jim Crow in the South have been described as a “peculiar institution”, the pattern in the rest of the country was just as novel a US innovation. The spontaneous character of the northern patterns of racial division meant they were less at odds with formal legal equality than the overt mechanisms employed in the South. Rather than being based on legal pronouncements against equality they were seemingly the expression of free choices.

We should note here that the distinction between these types of segregation has often been made using the terms *de facto* and *de jure*. But these terms do not always clarify. Generally the idea is that *de jure* applies as a description of formal legal segregation in the South, while *de facto* applies to the informal non-legal practices of

segregation in the North. According to Lassiter: “As a legal doctrine, “de facto segregation” means “innocent segregation”—spatial landscapes and racial arrangements that exist beyond the scope of judicial remedy, attributable solely to private market forces in the absence of any historical or contemporary government responsibility.”⁴⁴ However, as noted the by US Commission Rights in 1970 and reported by Crespino, “practically all racial housing patterns...could be traced to official actions by state, local and federal governments, and thus could not be considered strictly de facto.”⁴⁵ Where the term is used in this thesis it is in a looser sense of differentiating the formal segregation by law from indirect forms which may nonetheless be understood as having important elements of state backing.

Cold War Civil Rights

When race was raised as an issue in the post-war period and moving into the Civil Rights era, the informal character of racial divisions in much of the USA especially in contrast with the clear manifestations of organised and state-backed racial organisation in the Southern states had important repercussions. Essentially, while opposition to Southern institutions that violated legal norms of formal equality developed, there were much greater difficulties in addressing other expressions of racial division. It was one thing to enforce or establish legal equality but quite another to develop an effective political or economic intervention that might overcome entrenched divisions in states outside the Deep South which had been erected over such a long period of time.

⁴⁴ Matthew D. Lassiter, “De Jure/De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth” in Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (eds.), *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2010, 28.

⁴⁵ *Washington Post*, 12 April 1970 cited in Joseph Crespino, “The Best Defense is a Good Offense: The Stennis Amendment and the Fracturing of Liberal School Desegregation Policy, 1964–1972”, *Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2006): 317.

Here we move on to briefly examine how race was tackled – and not tackled – in the politics of the Cold War. When the USA came under international pressure over its racial divisions in the context of its leadership role in the Cold War, the federal state adopted a legalistic response focused predominantly on the most overt expressions of Southern racial organising. The “de facto” organisation of racial politics in the North especially in contrast to the formal structures of race in the South meant that it was largely seen as outside of the scope of legal and political action. In the immediate post war period, the divisions between blacks and whites seemed to have limited political repercussions at home. While the position of blacks had been identified as a problem, for example by Myrdal, there was little domestic impetus to resolve these divisions. However, with the Cold War and the competition with the Soviet Union, international considerations meant the position of blacks in the USA took on a wider significance. The USA’s argument that it represented democracy and freedom was brought into question by the treatment of its own black citizens. The difficulties for US foreign policy and the competition of ideas with the Soviet Union meant there was support from important players to do something about blacks’ second class status, at least to the extent that it became an issue in the Cold War. The Cold War was a double-edged sword for civil rights campaigners. The red-baiting and anti-Communism of the late 1940s and the 1950s had side-lined progressives that might otherwise have made headway building a constituency for and campaigning for substantive equality. The left in this period in particular was marginalised and often hounded by the authorities. At the same time, however, the USA had to be seen in the eyes of the world as living up to the ideals it argued it represented internationally. As Dudziak argues, “The Cold War created a constraining environment for domestic politics. It also gave rise to new opportunities

for those who could exploit Cold War anxieties, while yet remaining within the bounds of acceptable “Americanism”.⁴⁶ Thus for example at the height of the Cold War the NAACP presented its campaign for racial reform as part of the struggle against communism.⁴⁷

The issue of race in the Cold War became an important consideration for the federal authorities. The connection between Cold War rivalry and the need to do something about racial divisions – “if we wish to inspire the peoples of the world whose freedom is in jeopardy” –was highlighted in a speech in February 1948 by President Truman.⁴⁸ Similarly, the Secretary of State Dean Acheson, the architect of early US foreign policy in the Cold War made the case that this had become a key question for international relations. An early significant consequence of this changed approach was that in November 1948, Truman gave a presidential decree that the armed forces should be desegregated. The use of Cold War/foreign policy justifications for dealing with race also played an important role in key early civil rights cases in the courts. Though not always made explicit in the judgements themselves, for several important civil rights cases the Supreme Court was supplied with *amicus curae* – or “friends of the court” briefings – from the State Department that stressed the importance to the national interest of resolving these cases with the extension of rights to blacks. In cases relating to restrictive covenants, segregation in railroad cars that went across state lines and in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the State Department took the novel step of intervening through these briefings even when the direct interests of the country were not at stake. Dudziak makes the

⁴⁶ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁸ Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to the Congress on Civil Rights”, American Presidency Project, 2 February 1948, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13006>

convincing case that State Department arguments were likely to be influential to the court already accustomed to making decisions taking into account national security during the Second World War and which was attuned to what was at stake during the Cold War. Additionally, several judges had travelled abroad and knew the interest shown abroad in the treatment of blacks.⁴⁹

The efforts of the federal government to counter overseas concerns had some success. The formal decisions in court for civil rights enabled both the State Department and friends of the USA abroad to develop an argument that civil rights were moving in the right direction and that the government itself was in support of these rights. By comparing the situation with slavery the argument could be made that the situation of blacks had improved greatly in a short time. Where court decisions relied on constitutional law rather than statutory law, as was the case, for example, with restrictive covenants and in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the argument could be made that this was a vindication of the country's founding documents. Even the opposition in the South to integration, for example, could show the right to dissent was guaranteed by the federal structure in the constitution but also that civil rights could be redefined as entrenched regional prejudice that the government was working to overcome.⁵⁰ It should be noted, however, that it was easier to establish formal equality in the courts or to make pronouncements about racial divisions than to overturn these racial divisions in practice. For example, *Brown v. Board of Education* while setting an important legal precedent did not greatly transform school segregation. The ruling was rendered ineffective through delaying tactics and other bureaucratic measures even after the Supreme Court

⁴⁹ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 102-106.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

returned to the case and ruled that it must be implemented immediately. Bureaucratic measures outside the formal requirements of the law were used to greatly limit numbers of black students that went to white schools. The passage of laws was at the time, however, sufficient for presenting an image of the USA to the world. As Dudziak notes, the “Cold War imperative could be addressed largely through formal pronouncements about the law.”⁵¹

With the successful launch of the Sputnik satellite in October 1957, the stakes of the Cold War were further raised. The perception was that the USA had been complacent under Eisenhower and had fallen behind Soviet competition. For example, gross national product had grown only 2 per cent per year from 1953 to 1957. The self-reflection this provoked helped usher in John F. Kennedy as a youthful dynamic leader who might revive the nation in the 1960 election and gave scope for liberal ideas that would countenance a more interventionist approach in domestic affairs.⁵²

Despite this potential, civil rights for Kennedy were still seen in international terms. According to Harris Wofford, Kennedy’s advisor on civil rights in the 1960 election, the “dominant issues” for Kennedy were always foreign policy and US-Soviet relations. Civil rights were always a problem rather than an issue to promote.⁵³ In the wake of civil rights activism in the South – of the lunch counter sit-ins of 1960 and the Freedom Riders of 1961 – and the violent response that came with it, Kennedy was forced to try to deal with these issues, vitally because of the response in the foreign press. Kennedy, for example, negotiated with the Mississippi governor to try

⁵¹ Ibid., 151.

⁵² Allen J. Matusow, *The Unravelling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009 [1984]), 8-10.

⁵³ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 155.

to avoid damaging conflict although through the expedient of the state arresting and imprisoning the Freedom Riders. One measure of the importance of civil rights and perhaps a false sense of self-congratulation came with the end of Kennedy's first year in office. A draft list of "Major Foreign Policy measures Taken by the Kennedy Administration" was drawn up. On this list came: "the orderly evolution of desegregation in the United States" and the note alongside: "This has had a favourable effect overseas."⁵⁴ Here segregation was seen only in its Southern incarnation.

Over time civil rights campaigning led to the dismantling of Jim Crow in the South. However, this was not simply a matter of the power of the campaigning or of the external spotlight of media attention and the embarrassment of racial politics in the context of the Cold War. Several factors came together to make the regulation of labour under Jim Crow law inefficient and counter-productive. For example, labour saving investments in agriculture had undermined the requirement for cheap agricultural labour in Southern development and thus an important part of the rationale for Southern forms of segregation. Additionally the ability of blacks to move out of the South meant that crackdowns might be counter-productive. The amassing of blacks in urban areas in the South also meant that Jim Crow repression was increasingly countered. The costs and disruption of repression associated with Jim Crow came to be seen as retarding development and investment in the South where previously repression of the black population in disciplining black labour and reducing agricultural wages acted as a spur to agricultural production.

Thaddeus Russell, an author at odds with the mainstream narrative of success by a united, respectable civil rights movement in the South, paints an interesting picture of

⁵⁴ Ibid., 163.

the situation in Birmingham, Alabama of what these changes could mean.⁵⁵ Russell notes that prior to the media concentration on Birmingham in 1963 the city had faced several years of conflict. Thus it was not so much the peaceful civil rights protesters that were the subject of fire hoses and police dogs unleashed by Bull Connor, the city's Commissioner of Public Safety, but rather locals who had pelted his men with rocks, bottles and bricks. In this context Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail" offered the authorities a way out as a means of negotiation rather than confronting "a frightening racial nightmare" that would result if blacks abandoned rapprochement with the authorities and came to support Black nationalism.⁵⁶ Pushing on the other side was Sidney Smyer, president of the chamber of commerce, who presided over a city which had nearly a third of its property vacant and who took part in making a deal with the Civil Rights group, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Smyer who described himself as a "segregationist from top to bottom" argued the deal to de-segregate was in the interest of Birmingham stockholders: "We've got to have growth if we want to develop [the city], and you can't have it in a city of hate and violence." Russell cites Smyer's later recollection as "I wanted some peace, too, and that's the honest truth".⁵⁷

Any linear narrative of the building up of momentum around civil rights campaigning from Brown onwards seems flawed. For example ten years after Brown in 1964 as

⁵⁵ Thaddeus Russell. *A Renegade History of the United States*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), chapter 14.

⁵⁶ Martin Luther King Jr., August 1963, "Letter from Birmingham Jail", accessed 16 April 2015, <http://www.uscrossier.org/pullias/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/king.pdf> Malcolm X communicated a similar idea to Martin Luther King's widow Coretta Scott King when he met her in Selma in 1965: "I didn't come to Selma to make his job more difficult but I thought that if the White people understood what the alternative was that they would be more inclined to listen to your husband. And so that's why I came". Jackie Shearer, "Interview with Coretta Scott King", 21 November 1988, accessed 16 April 2015, <http://digital.wustl.edu/e/eii/eiiweb/kin5427.0224.089corettascottking.html>

⁵⁷ Russell, *A Renegade History*, 323.

the civil rights act was passed only about one per cent of black children in the South attended a racially-mixed school. However, by 1966 that had increased to 6.1 per cent; by 1967 to 16.9 per cent, by 1969 to 32 per cent, and by 1973 to 90 per cent.⁵⁸ Klarman argues that the most important role of *Brown* was in the reaction to the judgement. This reaction ensured that by the early 1960s segregationist hardliners often held office by the early 1960s. It was their violent reaction, he argues, that led to the TV pictures that alienated northern opinion.⁵⁹ However, it seems a stretch that such hard-line support for segregation would be so overly affected by public opinion in the Northern states. For example bureaucratic measures that limited desegregation of schools might simply have continued. Rather it seems that increasingly the costs and inconvenience of dividing the population, the decreasing dependence on cheap agricultural labour and the effect of PR on investment and trade eventually outweighed the benefits for segregationists such that by the late 1960s such forms of organisation had outlived their usefulness to the extent that support for formal segregation largely collapsed. That the violence and the portrayal of the violence had undermined the moral case of the segregationists did not help but this should not be understood as sufficient to explain the collapse of Jim Crow.

By way of contrast attempts to overcome segregation in the North foundered on the opposition met there. Here Martin Luther King's attempts to counter segregation and campaign for fair housing in Chicago in 1966 are instructive. Despite Chicago's one million black residents King's initial demonstrations could muster only a few hundred supporters. In July 1966 two hundred demonstrators met two thousand whites in

⁵⁸ Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and The Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 362-363.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 364.

Gage Park. By August 600 marchers in Marquette park met 4,000 whites.⁶⁰ Matusow notes that the opposition was fierce and determined: “the descendants of the Irish, Italians and Poles who resided in neighborhoods like Gage Park, Bogan and Marquette Park had already fled the black invasion – sometimes twice – and would not run again.”⁶¹ Against such opposition tied to the voting bloc behind Chicago’s Mayor Daley federal backing dried up. For Matusow this confrontation effectively signalled the end of Johnson’s civil rights push as “[t]empted he would count his divisions and then ingloriously quit the battle.”⁶² The political calculus for Johnson was such that “forced to choose between Daley and King – between the black minority in the ghetto and the white majority whom Daley represented – he did what any politician concerned with survival would do. He chose Daley.”⁶³

The Misleading Southern Narrative of Race

While many discussions of race in the twentieth century USA focus on the South and map out the role of the South in particular our presentation has highlighted the patterns of racial separation that persisted in the North. In many ways there is a hidden history of racial division in the North that only emerges much later as an issue. Sugrue’s 2008 work, *Sweet Land of Liberty* is subtitled “The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North”. Loewen’s 2005 work that focuses on racial exclusion in Northern towns is subtitled “A Hidden Dimension of American Racism”. The classic pattern is to discuss the inequities of the South and the civil rights struggle that fully emerges in the 1960s. However, the patterns of development in the North played an important role creating a basis for racial division, racial

⁶⁰ Matusow, *Unravelling*, 204-205.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 204-205.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 180.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 199.

conservatism and the establishment of whiteness as the opposite pole to blackness on a national level.

The formal and legal separation of the South sets it out as unambiguous case of injustice and has become central in the narrative of the growth of civil rights. However, the unproblematic expansion of whites on purpose suburbs until the 1960s also speaks to the character of racial politics of the North. So, for example, Gunnar Myrdal's whose 1944 work *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* became an important marker in mapping out the problems of race relations in the USA was mainly observed in relation to Southern states. Indeed, although the work is seen as being important, it "received fairly little attention in the war-torn decade in which it was published".⁶⁴ Despite the effective policies and pursuit of segregation in the North, effective opposition was only raised by the 1960s.

The government support for the development of suburbia as against the city or else the practices that reinforced racial segregation in housing until the 1960s were largely ignored at the time and not incorporated into an understanding of how racial divisions in the USA developed.⁶⁵ By contrast in our reading the separation of the races comes out of the drawing of racial lines hammered out in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century. Although there was at times support in the North for state protection for blacks when attacked in the South, the separation of races in the North shows how the idea of the equality of blacks had been rejected nationally.

⁶⁴ Vincent L. Hutchings and Nicholas A. Valentino, "The Centrality of Race in American Politics", *American Review of Political Science* (2004): 383.

⁶⁵ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 214.

While inspiring and motivational in many respects, the fact that racial inequality was presented as an issue that plagued the white moral conscience tended to place undue emphasis on the strictly formal aspects of racial discrimination and the ethical intentions of white Americans. In the process, equally important aspects of the problem were written out of consideration.⁶⁶ Hall argues that there has been a simplifying of the narrative of what the civil rights movement that limited it to being a fight for formal equality that allowed it to be “celebrat[ed] as a natural progression of American values” and be used as a “satisfying morality tale”.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism*, 122.

⁶⁷ Hall. “The Long Civil Rights Movement...”, 1235.

Part III

The Shifting Meaning of Race

Chapter 7: Testing the White Electorate

The last two chapters argued race in the USA in its modern sense came out of the accommodations of nationality and class from the late nineteenth century through to the 1940s. This was consolidated in the twentieth century through the physical separation of whites from blacks which was at the same time the coming together of whites of various ethnicities in the suburbs. This historical appreciation of race makes it part of political developments rather than simply being prejudice external to those developments. Subsequently we can approach race in the 2008 election from a fresh perspective. In this chapter and the next we look at two key themes related to race that were raised as part of the election: the idea of white bases of support (discussed in this chapter) and the importance given to the candidate's racial background (discussed in the next).

This chapter investigates the idea that the 2008 election demonstrated the extent to which race matters in US politics. An important part of how race was understood in 2008 was that the candidacy of a black man would put the level of white racial prejudice under examination. This was shown, for example, in the claims following the Obama victory that the USA was "post-racial". Presumably black votes for a black president did not demonstrate that these voters had moved beyond race and as so the test was one of non-black and predominantly white voters.¹ This chapter examines the idea that the racial outlook of whites explains key electoral changes.

¹ With 69 million of the 130 million votes cast in 2008, Obama is the "largest vote getter in US history". Obama gained 96 per cent of black votes. Turnout was 66.8 per cent up 18 per cent from the 2004 election and above the record of 58.5 per cent in 1964. Nearly 24 per cent of Obama's votes came from blacks. Charles P. Henry, "Toward a Multiracial Democracy: The Jackson and Obama Contributions" in Charles P. Henry, Robert L. Allen and Robert Chrisman (eds.) *The Obama Phenomenon: Toward a Multiracial Democracy* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 28; Martin Kilson, "Analysis of Black American Voters in Barack Obama's Victory" in

A short note on sources is appropriate at this point. As per the previous chapter the discussion of the Southern Strategy is further covered by a loose school of revisionist scholars looking at the South. Where the chapter covers the 1970s and the opening up of discussions on race –for example, the Kerner report sold in the millions – there are some difficulties. There is no definitive work that presents a picture of race in this period. The chapter makes its case through a series of works and some journalistic material. Some support is taken from Matusow who provides useful overview of the general politics of the period. The discussion on the end of racial exclusion uses the timely debate that came with the 2010 census between Vigdor and Logan facilitated by a symposium of the American Sociological Association. This provides useful empirical support for the idea of the end of exclusion and the main views as to the cause of this opening up. In attempting to understand one of the reasons why the turnaround in race seems stunted Frymer is used.² He explains the orientation of the main parties towards race. He usefully develops the idea of black capture and that the attitudes of the main parties do not constitute a simple competition for votes. There are a number to authors used to understand the changed suburban landscape. Danielson is used in an old but not dated analysis of the political character of the suburbs that looks in some detail at the application and importance of local zoning laws.³ Self and Sugrue’s work is

Charles P. Henry, Robert L. Allen and Robert Chrisman (eds.) *The Obama Phenomenon: Toward a Multiracial Democracy*, (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 54. According to Kilson, the black turnout ensured wins in Indiana, Ohio, Virginia and Pennsylvania. According to Ronald Walters (cited in Kilson), the black vote “influenced” victory in North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Indiana, and without these states McCain would have won. Ibid.

² Paul Frymer. *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

³ Michael N. Danielson, *The Politics of Exclusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 27

important in examining changes in the suburbs⁴ but the chapter's main source is the attempt at a substantial categorisation of heterogenous suburban spaces found in Land, Sanchez and Berube.⁵

It has been argued that appeals to the racial prejudices of whites have been effective in attracting support for the Republicans in particular, but also in undermining a liberal approach in politics. The refrain that there are large sections of the white electorate responsive to appeals based on racial prejudice has been constant from the Civil Rights era onwards. Over time this has been discussed in several often overlapping ways. In the earliest period this took the form that simply there was a white backlash to civil rights legislation. Later the argument is that the Republican Party pursued (and some maintain still pursue) a "Southern strategy" using race-related "wedge" issues to divide the groupings that came together as the New Deal coalition and especially to peel off white support. This approach began in the South, goes the argument, and then is later applied more widely in what has been described as the "Southernisation" of US politics.⁶ In more recent years the idea is that racial politicking takes on a more subtle form as coded racial appeals. This has also been described as "dog-whistle" politics where the implied racial message is either understood as such by racially motivated recipients or, in some readings, acts on the unconscious prejudices of the listener.⁷ For example highlighting black recipients of

⁴ Robert O. Self and Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Power of Place: Race, Political Economy, and Identity in the Postwar Metropolis" in Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (eds.), *A Companion to Post-1945 America* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2002)

⁵ Robert E. Lang, Thomas W. Sanchez and Alan Berube, "The New Suburban Politics: A County-Based Analysis of Metropolitan Voting Trends Since 2000" in Ruy A. Teixeira (ed.), *Red, Blue, and Purple America: The Future of Election Demographics* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2009). Epub edition.

⁶ The term seems to have been first coined by John Egerton in *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974).

⁷ Ian Hanley López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

welfare might undermine support for the welfare state and related liberal policies. Likewise highlighting black criminality would reinforce the idea of an underserving poor and undermine liberal policy responses in general.

Should the 2008 election signal a change in these perceived racial responses, this would, given the understanding, potentially reflect significant changes in white racial outlooks and thus in the political landscape. In the 2008 election this view and the “hope” for a polity that had moved beyond race were expressed indirectly. Obama at times described race as a distraction in politics. One way of reading this is that appeals to race worked on prejudices that stopped recipients from understanding the rational issues being presented and distracted them from their real interests.⁸ The excitement of Democrat activists that “race doesn’t matter” might be understood as simply that whites were open to voting for Obama, a black candidate. However, it can also be understood more expansively in that racial appeals might no longer act to undermine Democrat support and so leave Republicans unable to apply what has been one of their key political resources. Notably there was an added release of tension because these were actual votes for Obama – opinion polls it was thought might be subject to the “Bradley Effect” i.e. whites hiding their prejudices against a black candidate when responding to informal polling and would revert to a white candidate in the privacy of the polling booth.⁹

⁸ For an example of this approach see Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, (New York: Picador, 2005).

⁹ Rickey Hill, “The Race Problematic, The Narrative of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Election of Barack Obama” in Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke (eds.), *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America’s New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 144; This was also discussed as a potential issue in the New Hampshire primary, see Carly Fraser, “Race, Postblack Politics, and the Candidacy of Barack Obama” in Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke (eds.), *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America’s New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 144, 170. One study purported to show the Bradley effect at work in the Democrat primaries in states with low black populations but also a

However, from our reading, the way in which racial prejudice is considered as being apart from politics means that there are assumptions being made that electoral support follows racial outlooks which exist independently of political arrangements. In other words the racial prejudices supposedly on display are taken for granted and inadequately theorised. A white majority is simply presumed to be showing (or in the case of the Obama victory, perhaps, now not showing) a racial outlook. Race is often seen as simply an irrational outlook that does not belong in political science whereas a rational, scientific view in contrast tells us that there are no meaningful racial differences.¹⁰

On the basis of the understanding of race developed in the previous chapters we can attempt an investigation of the idea that the effectiveness of racial appeals explains shifts in support to Republicans through undermining liberal ideas and bolstering conservative ones. The thesis does not attempt to work through all the racial appeals and their effectiveness and relevance from the Civil Rights period onwards. Rather we use a case study of one key way in which these racial appeals have been understood: the Southern strategy. The Southern strategy, it has been argued, describes how the Republicans use appeals to the racial prejudices of Southern whites which in most readings has been extended to constituencies outside the South. Our approach brings into question the idea of a Southern strategy and with it similar ways in which race has been understood. Subsequently, we develop the idea

“Reverse” Bradley effect in states with large black populations. Anthony G. Greenwald and Bethany Albertson, “Tracking the Race Factor”, 14 March 2008, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/05/tracking-the-race-factor/>. Another academic notes that the Bradley effect has itself been brought into question and suggests that what is important is not the subconscious bias but that once called to attention any bias is not defended Richard A. Epstein, “The Good News on Race Relations”, *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 157, No. 210, 2009, 218

¹⁰ For one example of this see Kenan Malik, *Man, Beast and Zombie: What Science Can and Cannot Tell Us About Human Nature* (London: Wedenfeld & Nicolson, 2000): 134-139.

that a better way to understand racial appeals is through politics and in particular we suggest that rather than the politics of race, politics associated with a suburban orientation can better describe the changes in recent years. We suggest an alternative reading of changes in racial outlooks among whites, suggesting that the racial politics of the past as understood in the post-war period has little importance today.

It should be noted that the analysis here is not questioning whether or not racial appeals were effective at times in winning support. Such appeals and responses have been important. Rather it raises two points. First it asks whether this is an explanation: do the changing racial tastes held in the minds of the electorate provide an adequate explanation for what happens. And second it asks, following an alternative reading of how race changes, how much the 2008 election might be described as being a test of white racial views.

Southern Strategy Reconsidered

The Southern strategy is associated with the work of electoral strategist Kevin Phillips in *The Emerging Republican Majority*.¹¹ The idea was that the Republicans could, for example, use opposition to civil rights measures or state intervention that supported blacks as a means to undermine the New Deal consensus and its associated voting bloc. In presidential elections from Nixon on, Republicans gathered sometimes significant support in what was previously a Solid South for the Democrats – although congressional results continued to consistently favour Democrat incumbents until 1994. Phillips' work was controversial at the time (and remains so); Phillips himself made it clear in a preface to his work that it was not

¹¹ Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015 [1969]).

official Republican policy although he worked for the campaign.¹² And the Nixon administration distanced itself from Phillips, although parts of his book were used in White House policy circles.¹³ However, it has become something of an established view that a central and effective plank of Republican electoral strategy in the post-Civil Rights period (and adapted at times as Democrat strategy¹⁴) has been cynical or Machiavellian use of appeals to racial prejudice.

Our reading of race, however, is that the idea of a Southern strategy is flawed. Rather than Southern racial attitudes being at play it is rather the context of largely white suburban politics on a national basis that Republican strategy should be understood. In 1968, for example, Nixon faced a nation that where for the first time the majority of Americans lived in suburbs. Rather than a Southern strategy, there is a suburban orientation at work. The related idea of the Southernisation of American politics is equally flawed. Although some lessons may have been taken from the appeal of racial prejudice in the South, the political sensitivities of the key politicians making racial appeals had already been established outside the South and reactions to racial appeals come in the context of the political and spatial divisions on a national basis.

This is an important distinction because the power or weight behind such prejudices is influenced not by the legacy of Jim Crow or else simply racial prejudice but by the culmination of white suburbanisation and the politics associated with it. The assumption behind the idea of the Southern strategy is racial prejudice as independent variable. Rather, an understanding of the development of racial

¹² Preface to the Princeton University Edition. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, xv.

¹³ “[D]uring the 1968 campaign Nixon press chief Herb Klein covertly circulated key segments of Phillips book.” James Boyd, “Nixon’s Southern Strategy: ‘It’s All in the Charts’”, *New York Times*, 17 May 1970.

¹⁴ For an example see the discussion on Clinton in the following chapter.

outlooks tied in with political change is required to gauge what has happened. In the post-Civil Rights period, it is changes in the political context of the suburbs, rather than a legacy of racial southern backwardness, that best explains political orientations.

Several “revisionist” scholars¹⁵ have in recent years also questioned the Southern strategy thesis both from the aspect that it misrepresents the South and that it ignores national patterns of division.¹⁶ They argue that the painting of the South as a backward region mired in racial resentment makes little sense. Southern distinctiveness has been undermined by economic development, the mass migration of people from outside the area, the growth of “Sunbelt” suburbia and the relative decline of the population in rural areas. These changes meant that increasingly the South reflected the USA as a whole. Lassiter baldly states that “the ‘Southern Strategy’ explanation of the political transformation of the modern South is wrong”.¹⁷

From the late 1930s onwards the South’s economy and politics was transformed by waves of state intervention. In 1937, per capita income in the South was half that of the rest of the nation and in July 1938 FDR declared the backwardness of the South as the nation’s number one economic problem.¹⁸ From that period on, in an attempt to resolve this problem and integrate the South into the US economy there was a prolonged period of state investment – generally done through military expenditure – in an attempt to raise the Southern economy to national levels. The relative

¹⁵ For some of the key authors see the collection: Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (eds.), *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010)

¹⁶ Darren Dochuk, “Revival on the Right: Making Sense of the Conservative Movement in Post-World War II American History”, *History Compass*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (2006): 975-999: 982.

¹⁷ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 5.

¹⁸ Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

dynamism of the South and West, especially in comparison with the atrophying of many North Eastern cities meant that as early as the 1968 election a third of the population of the South was born outside the region. As Reagan bowed out to be replaced by George H.W. Bush in 1988 over 50 per cent of Southern voters were born outside the South.¹⁹ This is not to say that there do not remain some areas that seem to have changed little since Jim Crow, but overall the South has become much more like the nation as a whole.

Perhaps the best example that highlights the limits of the Southern strategy idea is “busing”²⁰ – or the organised transportation of children across existing school boundaries in an attempt to desegregate schools.²¹ There was strong opposition to busing in the South, but it was opposition in other regions where this attempt at desegregation was derailed. This illustrates how there was not only opposition to civil rights initiatives in the South but in some ways a more determined defence of the racial arrangements outside the South.²² Northern segregation was brought into question through a 1970 amendment to the federal education bill by Mississippi Senator, John C. Stennis. The Stennis amendment highlighted how desegregation efforts in Southern schools were proceeding while the “de facto” segregation in Northern schools was left untouched and so called for funding to ensure equal desegregation efforts. This was a ploy by Southern segregationists to undermine school de-segregation in the South. Nonetheless the call to challenge de facto

¹⁹ Hodding Carter III, “The End of the South,” *Time*, 6 August 1990.

²⁰ Given the phenomena applies only to the USA, we use the US spelling throughout.

²¹ Desegregation in schools has, in particular, been attacked by Arendt on the basis that this might amount to political interference in social matters and more specifically that this is adults using their children to attempt to resolve problems of inequality. Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock”, *Dissent*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1959).

²² It should be noted in passing that Phillips’ doctoral thesis rested on the argument that civil rights campaigning would founder as it attempted to move North. James Boyd, “Nixon’s Southern Strategy: ‘It’s All in the Charts’”, *New York Times*, 17 May 1970.

segregation was taken up by some Northern liberals. In particular Abraham Ribicoff, senator from Connecticut and former Health, Education and Welfare Secretary under Kennedy, used the opportunity to attempt to highlight racial politics outside the South. This sparked off a debate that brought home the opposition to federal measures for school de-segregation and called “into question liberal policies that had all but been taken for granted since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act”²³ One example of the response was Alexander Bickel’s *New Republic* article which questioned whether too stringent a policy of integrating schools would be counter-productive and lead to white flight or else potentially go against the wishes of blacks by forcing desegregation. The article was circulated and quoted by Nixon as a political resource. Subsequently the amendment was watered down by both Democrats and Republicans and Northern desegregation efforts were limited. It was by opposing the issue of busing in particular, perhaps because of its intrusive character, that Nixon gained support, but the cause had already been decried by many Democrat political representatives.²⁴

From our analysis it seems misguided and at best one sided to claim that racial appeals by Republicans were the mechanism that broke up the New Deal coalition. Rather, whatever other actions were taken through the state by the New Deal, it was also the major US racial project of the twentieth century. It was not Southern racial outlooks that gave Republicans a foothold of support. Instead it was the divisions established by the mass white suburbanisation that was seen through and sponsored by New Deal programmes. Racial divisions were not used to undermine

²³ Joseph Crespino, “The Best Defense is a Good Offense: The Stennis Amendment and the Fracturing of Liberal School Desegregation Policy, 1964–1972”, *Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2006): 316.

²⁴ In 1972 Nixon noted that “Busing has become #1 Domestic issue... Dems are squirming” cited in Yuill, *Richard Nixon and the Rise of Affirmative Action*, 226-227.

support for New Deal measures, rather black/white racial divisions – as an aspect of whites coming together – were an important product of New Deal measures and a central part of the support for such measures. In 1969 Phillips argued that: “The Democratic Party fell victim to the ideological impetus of a liberalism which had carried it beyond programs taxing the few for the benefit of the many (the New Deal) to programs taxing the many on behalf of the few (the Great Society).”²⁵ However, the seeing of blacks as part of the minority (and their concentration in the cities) was not a given nor an invention of right wing propagandists. Indeed these racial divisions had been established in seeing through the New Deal project.²⁶

Overall, it can be argued that successful Republican candidates relied not on their understanding of racial backwardness in the old Southern mould, but rather started with their own understandings of the white suburban outlook:

Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan did not need to learn their political strategies from southern demagogues such as George Wallace. They honed their conservative platforms in the segregated suburbs of post-war California, and each secured forty-nine states in his presidential re-election campaign.²⁷

Rather than the Southernisation of US politics, it would be more accurate to talk in terms of the nationalisation of US politics where suburban concerns played a large part.

²⁵ Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, 15.

²⁶ For a discussion of Great Society initiatives, most of which were relatively small scale and which were often captured by white mayors, see Matusow, *The Unravelling of America*, chapters 4, 8 and 9.

²⁷ Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, “Introduction: The End of Southern History” in Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (eds.), *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

The idea that the South was a racist prototype was not universally accepted at the time. In particular it was questioned early on at least from the perspective that there was and had been large scale migration of Northerners to the South. For example in the review of Phillips' book Palsby noted that the Sunbelt was far from being wholly conservative which was at least partially explained by the South being rapidly in flux because of an influx of northerners.²⁸ Nonetheless, the idea of the Southern strategy and the Southernisation thesis has become the default reading. Lassiter argues that the simplicity of the argument goes a long way to explain its longevity.²⁹ We might add that over time the Southernisation thesis can take on something of the character of an excuse for poor electoral results based on the racism of the white electorate. From this perspective weaknesses in Democrat support are explained as being a consequence of irrational racial outlooks. Subsequently rather than attempt to find explanations for why Democrat policies do not appeal or seem ineffective, the electorate and the machinations of the Republicans can be blamed.

Diminished Race

Our argument does not deny that racial appeals were made and at times accepted. Bringing into question the Southern strategy does not mean that a suburban strategy might seem at times to amount to similar prejudices gaining expression. Rather with a different understanding of racial appeals we can understand their effect and their limits.

²⁸ Nelson W. Palsby, "An Emerging Republican Majority?", *The Public Interest*, Fall (1969): 121.

²⁹ "The "southern strategy" thesis is popular and ubiquitous precisely because it reduces a complex phenomenon of national political transformation to another familiar story of southern white backlash" Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, "Introduction: The End of Southern History" in Lassiter and Crespino, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, 6.

We now move on to suggest that from the late 1960s onwards the importance of race diminished on the basis of our analysis. Our historical reading of race suggests that there will be changes over time. Race is not some sort of “cultural meme” passed down through the ages as the legacy of slavery, or as “being white”. Rather the racial outlook under discussion is historically specific and will change with changed circumstances. Over time there were reasons that the racial ordering lessened. We want to suggest two main reasons behind these changes. The most important is that the motivations behind the creation of a racial order no longer applied, largely because of the culmination of this order, i.e. those motivations are satisfied. The second is that for the first time in the late 1960s and early 1970s the racial approach outside the South, previously unquestioned, became subject to a period of sustained scrutiny.

Increasingly the success of the racial aspect of the New Deal project meant that the initial reasons, justifications and motivations of accommodating white ethnics into a combined American whiteness were fulfilled and so had become less vital. Over time this seeing through of the racial order meant the original motivations lost much of their impetus. Whiteness was consolidated and white ethnicities dispersed in the suburban hinterlands. Over time white ethnics became indistinguishable from whites in general. For example, when looking at one increasingly important measure of social progress, college attendance, for those white ethnics born from 1946-1960 the levels of college attendance were the same as those for whites from Anglo backgrounds. For this cohort and its children the insecurities of fitting in to a white Protestant culture were no longer pressing. The figures for educational attainment go some way to show how much the various European ethnics had increasingly become white. Of US born “South-Central-East European ethnic” men born before

1916, roughly 21 per cent attended college compared to 30 per cent of third generation British born in the same period. While for those ethnics born from 1916-1930 the percentage increased to 28 per cent, for those of British ancestry the percentage attending college was still significantly more at 41 per cent. However for the cohort born 1931-1945 the ratio was nearly equal: 49.3 versus 52.6 per cent and for those born in 1946-1960 slightly more of those from South/Central/East European ethnic backgrounds attended college (55.7 per cent) than those of British ancestry (55.1 per cent).³⁰

One side-effect of settled life as white was paradoxically that ethnic identities could be looked upon in a more relaxed way. With security as whites, European ethnic whites were secure enough to search out their ethnic past. For example the television serialisation of Alex Haley's *Roots* in 1977 became the occasion for whites to look for their own rootedness through ethnicity in a way that previous generations would have found difficult to understand – although JFK partially prefigured this in his visit to Ireland in 1963.³¹ This did not so much undermine whiteness rather it was strengthened through a transformation from the whiteness of Plymouth Rock to a whiteness of Ellis Island.³² Indeed as Jacobson argues the change might be seen as a response to civil rights, as only through that adaptation is it possible “fully to understand how white primacy in American life survived the withering heat of the Civil Rights era and multiculturalism”.³³ But it also signalled the impetus of the past had weakened. With the culmination of whiteness in suburbia over time the preoccupation of distancing from blacks became less important overall.

³⁰ Richard D. Alba, *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 7.

³¹ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

This falling away of motivation is enhanced by a generational effect. The concerns of those setting up in all-white suburbs were not the same as the later generations who had grown up in such neighbourhoods. The concerns about their position in the polity, of class and nationality were largely resolved through whiteness and integration into the American mainstream. For the generations that left the city, links to past backgrounds had faded into memory and there was little institutional expression to keep those memories alive. Having a white ethnic background increasingly had little or no meaning in the realm of politics.

A second reason that race weakens is that for the first time at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s the racial ordering outside the South was effectively held up to scrutiny. The exposure of Northern prejudice – sometimes expressed as the North's loss of racial innocence – brought out into the open a set of arrangements and orientations that were difficult to defend both morally and politically. For a brief period at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, there was an examination of the racial divisions that had been created outside the South and the insoluble problem that this presented. It was as if there was an awakening to the racial project after decades of its enactment. The Kerner Commission of 1967 was setup in response to three years of urban rioting and highlighted the massive segregation in Northern cities. The report produced by the commission sold in the millions.³⁴ The discussion of the Stennis amendment added to the focus on the problematic Northern racial arrangements.

A sense of what this scrutiny meant was that Northern racial divisions could be described as “evil” in the paper of record. In a *New York Times* op-ed in February 1970, journalist Tom Wicker responding to the Stennis amendment noted that there

³⁴ Yuill, *Richard Nixon*, 61-63.

was “One Evil” of segregation that worked both North and South but that while the problems of the South were amenable to legal remedies those in the North were intractable. Looking to the federal government was possible through legal means in the South, but in the North the manpower to de-segregate schools was lacking as was, because of segregation’s informal character, the clear evidence against “virtually every American city”. Ultimately the barrier, according to Wicker, was what Ribicoff had called the “monumental hypocrisy” and widespread racism in the North.³⁵ It should be noted, there was no political will to see through a reversal of the racial project that had seen the cities increasingly hollowed out. Nor was there a constituency to support such a project. Those that remained in the cities had much less weight and represented much less. The strife of the inner cities had to be tackled in some way, but there was little in the way of a programme to directly resolve the massive divisions that lay behind such strife. Instead the city, once the hub of a dynamic economy, came to be increasingly written off. Alongside this came the inability to incorporate blacks into mainstream US life. While there had been the mass intervention that effectively made the various European ethnics white through, for example, the GI Bill acting in the context of the post-war boom, a similar programme for the cities and the blacks left there seemed implausible in the 1970s as the economy largely stagnated.³⁶ In many ways this impasse marked the end of the liberal project, something we return to in the next chapter.

³⁵ Tom Wicker, “In the Nation: One Evil, Two Problems”, *New York Times*, 12 February 1970

³⁶ It should be noted that nonetheless programmes to revive the cities continued albeit the resources did not match the task. As Wilson notes on the latest round of attempts by George W. Bush, “capital has continued to try to mobilize all territories and places as forces of production and consumption. Bush, pursuing yet another round of institutional fix, has moved even more decisively to re-configure the national institutional base, centred on re-defining the nation state’s already reduced social welfare role to use resources more entrepreneurially and ‘efficiently’.” David Wilson, *Cities and Race: America’s New Black Ghetto* (London: Routledge, 2007), 102

The End of Suburban Racial Exclusion?

Despite the inability to resolve the problems of the cities it was in this period that the racial ordering as the coming together of whites and exclusion of blacks came to a culmination. In support of our contention that the racial ordering based around the suburbs was weakening, from the 1970s the absolute exclusion of blacks from suburban locales ends and segregation declines rapidly. We turn to update the picture of segregation on a national scale. While there has been an ongoing and complex discussion over many decades about segregation we focus on the discussion that came with the release of the 2010 census figures as the most recent definitive set of figures. Our purpose here is not to explain all the changes that have taken place and it may be that the changes discussed are not linear over time or uniform across regions. Rather we want to draw out that there are new patterns distinct from the post-war period when the spatialization of race was an index of the seeing through of the racial project of a combined whiteness.

Academic analysis of racial segregation using census data shows racial segregation increasing in the USA from 1890 until peak values in 1960 and 1970 (the figure for 1970 is very similar to that of 1960).⁵⁵ Since 1970, levels of segregation have decreased significantly. One important and widely used demographic measure used when looking at patterns of divisions is the “Dissimilarity Index”. This number measures “the proportion of either group that would have to change neighborhoods to be evenly distributed across the neighborhoods in the metropolitan area”⁵⁶ under consideration. The number is relative to the overall proportions in the population in a

⁵⁵ Jacob L. Vigdor, “Weighing and Measuring the Decline in Residential Segregation”, *City & Community*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2013): 170.

⁵⁶ Nancy Denton, “Interpreting US Segregation Trends: Two Perspectives”, *City & Community*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2013): 158.

metropolitan grouping and nationally is weighted by the numbers affected. In 1960 and 1970, this number for blacks and their “dissimilarity” with non-Hispanic whites nationally was 79. In other words for neighbourhoods within a wider metropolitan area to have the same proportion of blacks and non-Hispanic whites, on average 79 per cent of blacks would have to move out of their neighbourhoods (for this calculation meaning out of the census tracts where they lived) or else 79 per cent of non-Hispanic whites would have to disperse. By 1980 that number was reduced by about 6 points to 72.8%. By 1990 the index was reduced a further 6 points to 67.3 per cent and, by 2000, a further 3 points to 63.8 per cent. The dissimilarity index from the 2010 census had decreased by a further 5 points from its level in 2000 to 59.1 per cent. By 2010 according to estimates by Vigdor, using levels of black dissimilarity with non-blacks (which have been measured over a longer period of time than dissimilarity levels of blacks with non-Hispanic whites) levels of segregation had, by that measure at least, returned to values last seen in 1910.⁵⁷

One factor in this change, which accounts for about a quarter of the total,⁵⁸ has been the inter-regional migration from Northern cities to the South. The “Sunbelt reversal” saw large numbers (of both blacks and whites) move for work to Southern states whose levels of segregation were lower than average national levels. In these areas blacks live in closer proximity to whites. This is largely for historical reasons as the movement of blacks to Southern cities, and thus the racial structuring of these cities, had taken place with Reconstruction and before the geographical suburban dispersion that came with the street car and later the motor car. Blacks and whites lived in closer proximity in the South and at least as measured by distance blacks

⁵⁷ Vigdor, “Weighing...”, 170

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 171

were more integrated into the division of labour. So roughly a quarter of the change in national averages came “[b]ecause Southern cities are less segregated” and so “the broad population movement from Rust Belt to Sun Belt since the 1960s has moved both blacks and whites away from a more segregated region towards a less-segregated region.”⁵⁹

However, more broadly, previous barriers to movement decreased and many blacks have been able to take advantage of this. Vigdor sees the most important factor as being the introduction of the 1968 Fair Housing Act and the end to legalised discrimination in housing – citing the timing of the reversal as key. He argues that black suburbanisation developed after the legal changes in 1968 and that this has led to a great reduction in the number of all white census tracts; in 1960, 20 percent of census tracts had no blacks (the tracts then covering large cities and suburbs) but by 2010 only half a per cent of census tracts had no blacks at all (census tracts in the 2010 survey extended to all areas nationally).⁶⁰ Logan, by contrast, sees “specific processes of neighborhood change” as being most important in reducing barriers to movement. He argues that “[a]ll-white neighborhoods are almost always first integrated by the entry of Hispanics and/or Asians, only then admitting blacks in substantial numbers”.⁶¹ Research by Logan and Zhang of neighborhood composition from 1980 to 2010 in the USA’s 20 most multi-ethnic metropolitan regions showed that white neighbourhoods attracting Asian and/or Hispanic migrants can subsequently attract blacks in numbers without the exodus of whites that would generally have occurred previously when blacks moved in to all-white areas. They argue that the presence of Asians and/or Hispanics acts as a “social buffer” for

⁵⁹ Ibid., 171.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ John R. Logan, “The Persistence of Segregation in the 21st Century Metropolis”, *City & Community*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2013): 164.

black entrants. The resulting area then becomes what is described as a “global neighborhood” – and importantly such neighbourhoods have been seen to be stable over time. Notably, by contrast, the entrance of whites to all minority neighbourhoods, whatever the composition, is much rarer. Thus some integration is facilitated by Asian and Hispanic immigration that increases from the 1980s.⁶² The two main authors in this debate facilitated by a symposium of the American Sociological Association, Vigdor and Logan, dispute how much the mechanisms each has identified explain the changes that have taken place. Vigdor argues that the numbers identified in multi-ethnic neighbourhood transitions amount to only 10 per cent of the black population.⁶³ Logan argues that the Fair Housing Act of 1968 was weakly enforced and so “seems unlikely” to explain the changes identified.⁶⁴ While both views have merit as partial explanations, the opening up of suburban locations to blacks comes with broader changes in whiteness discussed above and is not merely a consequence of legal changes or a function of racial buffering in itself.

However, despite the decrease, because of the massive levels of segregation large areas where blacks and whites live separate existences remain especially concentrated in cities outside the South. Despite their 2012 paper being called “The End of the Segregated Century”, Vigdor and Glaeser note that the decline in segregation “does not mean that segregation has disappeared: the typical urban African-American lives in a housing market where more than half the black

⁶² John R. Logan and Wenquan Zhang, “Global Neighborhoods: New Evidence from Census 2010”, *US2010 Project* (November 2011): 1-4.

⁶³ Vigdor, “Weighing...”, 173.

⁶⁴ Logan, “The Persistence...”, 165. For support to this point see Yuill, *Richard Nixon*, 172

population would need to move in order to achieve complete integration”.⁶⁵ Logan argues that the data from the 2010 census are “signs of incomplete and mixed progress in reducing racial barriers at the neighborhood level”.³⁷ Notably cities in the North East and Mid-West remain highly segregated in what Logan calls the “Ghetto Belt”.³⁸

Additionally the broad figures on reduced segregation do not perhaps tell the whole story. There is also a question as to the quality of the main types of suburbs into which blacks have moved based on the facilities and amenities found there. Logan notes that segregation acts not simply at the level of divided communities but also needs to be measured by other factors such as resource availability. On average Blacks and Hispanics live in neighbourhoods with fewer resources than those available on average to whites. There remain questions of opportunity and substantial equality despite the opening up of locations for blacks. Tackling these issues is required otherwise despite suburban mobility the pattern may often be one of black poverty shifting to new locations. Imbroscio notes that many of the new suburban destinations that former poor residents move to are poor and are considered “at risk” – Ferguson, Missouri being one recently publicised example of one of these locations. He notes the dominant “Liberal Urban Policy” concentrates on people living in the wrong place rather than tackling the creation of better places. Ironically, he notes, there is an emphasis on dispersal just as there are the beginnings of something of an urban renaissance in many central cities.⁶⁷ Imbroscio

⁶⁵ Edward Galeser and Jacob Vigdor, “The End of the Segregated Century: Racial Separation in America’s Neighborhoods, 1890-2010”, *Civic Report No. 66*, Manhattan Institute (January 2012).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁸ Logan, “The Persistence...”, 162.

⁶⁷ David Imbroscio, “Beyond Mobility: The Limits of Liberal Urban Policy”, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2012): 13.

argues that there is an over emphasis on mobility and, when mobility does not seem to resolve problems, the policy response is for more mobility.

The previous absolute barrier to black relocation in the suburbs was removed from the 1970s. Albeit over a forty year time span segregation has decreased significantly to levels last seen in 1910 or sixty years before the process started. This did not resolve the ghetto belt or all the divisions but 100 per cent all-white suburbs are increasingly a dead letter, as too is residential segregation enforced by violence and intimidation. While barriers to movement remain, in the cost of property for example, the hostility to movement that held sway previously has significantly diminished. This was at the same time as legal changes undermining racial discrimination but it happened as attitudes on race liberalised with the political changes noted above. Changes in segregation were not just the consequences of legal changes but rather a result of the greatly reduced need for racial distancing that had been at the heart of the whiteness developed in the twentieth century.

It should be noted that the above discussion does not suggest that the separation of blacks and whites no longer exists. There are a whole raft of statistics on wealth, education, employment, intermarriage, health etc., that continue to show the division between blacks and others. The 59.1 per cent dissimilarity in the 2010 census index still means that on average nearly six out of every ten blacks (or alternatively of non-Hispanic whites) would have to move out of their local area to match the wider region's racial proportions. And, as this is the average, in many locales this number is much higher. Blacks all too often lead a separate existence from whites and have inferior local resources and opportunities.

The point being made here is not that the divisions are overcome. Rather the numbers reflect the playing out of the impetus for spatial separation which was a product of the incorporation of white ethnics. This political project culminated in the 1970s and while many material and social divisions around race persist, the previous racial impetus is no longer the overarching factor that it was. We now turn to examine how factors related to the politics of space have complicated the picture and in many ways better describe contemporary politics.

From Race to Place

We have attempted to show the falling away of racial outlooks alongside the abolition of absolute barriers to black mobility that takes place from the 1970s based on our understanding of race. This brings into question the extent to which racial prejudice among whites accounts for Republican support especially over time. It also suggests the claim that the 2008 election tested these racial outlooks is questionable. We move on to consider two points that nonetheless support the perception that racial prejudices are indicated in voting patterns. The first is a continued political orientation towards a perceived white vote by the major political parties. The second is the way in which what might be called a “politics of space”³⁹ has come to replace, and often seems confused with, racial outlooks, i.e. the “politics of race”.

As Frymer argues, in an important work on how the major parties see race, party leaders have an orientation towards the perceived white median voter.⁴⁰ Frymer makes the case that there is a fixed view of the electorate being applied. This fixed view has it that because of the racial outlook of whites, an orientation towards

³⁹ This term is borrowed from Dochuk, “Revival on the Right”.

⁴⁰ Paul Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

fulfilling black interests would lose votes. Frymer looks at the way in which the political class, not merely Republicans, seems to rule black concerns out of consideration in general. Frymer questions default, abstract models of party competition that suggest that parties would compete for votes from all groups including those of blacks and so adjust policies accordingly. Rather black voters are “captured”, in that the party they support can take their vote for granted and the other party does not seem to want them. This is because the political calculus for the other party is that appealing for black support would lose more votes from whites than might be gained from blacks. Frymer notes that the perception of the views of the electorate as being racially motivated means that leaders in the main political parties are ready to promote what they see as white interests at the expense of blacks. This, he notes, does not necessarily reflect the views of white constituents. Frymer argues party leaders’ conception of the racial outlook of whites means that they “work actively and almost constantly to deny the salience of black interests.”⁴¹

White voter outlook when it comes to race is seen as fixed while the relationship of the structure of the political system to the divisions around race goes unseen. In effect rather than the two party system providing space for competition for black support, Frymer argues that the result is that race has not become a point on the liberal/conservative division in politics.⁴² The two party system as classically understood in political theory might result in parties competing for constituencies. However, only when there has been the absence of party competition because of the overwhelming support for one party – with the Republicans in the 1850s and with the Democrats in the 1960s – have party leaders felt able to directly address black

⁴¹ Ibid., 28.

⁴² Ibid., 32.

concerns. For Frymer, “the two-party system legitimates an agenda reflecting the preferences of white voters, and it structures black interests outside party competition.”⁴³

In Frymer’s view there is a political class that fails to lead and falls back, instead, on a deterministic view of the electorate. The basis of Frymer’s argument is the fixed way in which voters are seen and the perception of racial motivation. This he argues is because party leaders have a “Downsian” notion of the voter where a fixed outlook on the part of a voter is assumed and the role of the parties is to appeal to that outlook. Consequently the parties attempt to match opinion, e.g. by making policy on the basis of following polling results, and so fail to assume political leadership.⁴⁴ The widespread conception of white racial views as existing outside of politics, which we have noted several times, supports the contention that the political parties have followed a perceived racial division in effect giving shape to and extending those divisions that do exist.

However, what seems to be the main confusion with the falling away of racial motivations is that it is somewhat obscured and confused by a “politics of space”. What complicates the picture is that alongside a politics of race is a politics based on location that remains as the old racial outlooks have lost their vigour. The suggestion is that economic differences rather than racial separation increasingly lies behind

⁴³ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁴ Downs assumes that voters already have a clear conception of their political “tastes” and that the main difficulty lies in voters gaining sufficient information about how the parties match these tastes. The role of parties in this model is to match up to those views and the role of political leadership is minimised. For example, in a key text he argues that “the citizens’ political taste structure” is “assume[d] to be fixed” and the role of parties is largely conceived of as to appeal to those tastes. Anthony Downs, “An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy”, *The Journal of Political Economy* (1957): 139.

suburban politics. While Tip O' Neil has long maintained that "all politics is local"⁴⁵, the small self-governing suburban enclaves made that a reality. Already by 1960 the USA had 91,186 local governments that, in most places, controlled education, public works, social services and zoning regulations.⁴⁶ With self-contained services and self-government in suburbia, suburban politics and the material interests of suburbanites often militate against support for taxation and, for example, support for policies that might aid the urban poor including many blacks. From this standpoint it is difficult to completely disentangle the politics of race from the politics of space. For example, one might explain hostility to welfare provision on racial grounds (for example the point of view that blacks are lazy and that the money would be wasted) or else on the grounds of self-interest (taxation of suburbanites for services for others is not in the economic interests of suburban dwellers).

Indeed, looking at the development of suburbs as discussed in the last chapter, the inward looking and exclusive orientation was why suburbs were created and why they attempted to establish political independence through being separate administrative groupings. In his important work on suburban politics Danielson argues that:

Suburbia is essentially a political phenomenon. Political independence is the one thing the increasingly diversified settlements beyond the city limits have in common. Local autonomy means that suburban communities seek to control

⁴⁵ While it seems that O'Neill may not have coined the phrase, he is most closely associated with it. See: Barry Popik, "Origin of 'All Politics Is Local' (attention Rachel Maddow)", 28 September 2010, accessed 2 April 2015, <http://www.redstate.com/diary/barrypopik/2010/09/28/origin-of-all-politics-is-local-attention-rachel-maddow/>

⁴⁶ Robert O. Self and Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Power of Place: Race, Political Economy, and Identity in the Postwar Metropolis" in Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (eds.), *A Companion to Post-1945 America* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2002), 21-22, 25.

their own destiny largely free from the need to adjust their interests to those of other local jurisdictions and residents of the metropolis.⁴⁷

Danielson covers in detail the attempts by suburban residents to keep undesirables out, to exclude subsidized housing and attempt to limit housing density. This comes, for example, in zoning and building codes that make housing expensive and attempt to maintain a community of residents that matches the existing demographics. Writing in 1976, Danielson argues that while the attempts at exclusion have been influenced by racial considerations, overall exclusion is connected to elements of status and lifestyle linked with material interests. As Danielson notes, “racial motivations are difficult to isolate from other factors which prompt exclusionary policies” and “certainly the fact that many middle-class black suburbanites resist subsidized housing indicates that racial prejudice is not the only element in the exclusion of lower-income blacks from the suburbs”.⁴⁸ In many suburbs there has been an attempt at stopping any developments that might alter the types of residents allowed in that local area. Behind these restrictions is the fear that new entrants might mean an increase in levels of taxation required for local services.

However, while ostensibly whites came together in a whole number of identical “cookie-cutter” suburban housing projects, especially over time there has been economic differentiation. Suburbs have “grown remarkably large and complex in the last several decades” with “many suburbs having greater age and racial diversity than their core cities”. For example, against the stereotype, more housing units in suburbia contain single adults than families.⁴⁹ Increasingly, there is differentiated

⁴⁷ Michael N. Danielson, *The Politics of Exclusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 27.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁹ Robert E. Lang, Thomas W. Sanchez and Alan Berube, “The New Suburban Politics: A County-Based Analysis of Metropolitan Voting Trends Since 2000” in Ruy A. Teixeira (ed.), *Red, Blue, and*

suburban experience and new divisions in a fragmented suburban political landscape. The decline in residential segregation has come alongside differential impacts on suburban locations with many suburbs hit by recession, for example. Importantly, the politics of space does not simply replace the politics of race.

One study to categorise different types of suburbs and map this to political orientation is particularly illuminating. The authors look at the top 50 metropolitan areas which contain over half of the US population. They classify the 416 census counties in these areas using data on “commuting patterns, land use and growth” to create an urban/suburban type. This is generally related to the distance from an urban core and overall relates to population density. There are five categories. “Core” counties have “at least half of the workers commute to (or remain in) the ... major urban center in the metropolitan area” and have high population density (“1,000 housing units per square mile in 2000”). In “inner-suburban” counties again half or more of the workers commute to the urban centre and at least 90 per cent live in urban areas. Several represent suburbs annexed prior to World War Two and tend to immediately ring the urban core. “Mature-suburban” counties have at least 75 per cent living in urban areas and population growth above the national average but no more than 1.5 times that of the metropolitan area the county is in. In “emerging-suburban” counties at least 25 per cent live in urban areas and at least 5 per cent commute to the major urban centres. These are, in general, growing faster than the mature-urban counties. Finally the “exurbs” have less than 25 per cent living in an

urban area and under 5 per cent commute to the urban centre. These may be areas at the beginning of experiencing large scale suburbanisation.⁵⁰

The authors then map the urban/suburban types to the voting record in several national elections from 2000 to 2006: the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 and the House elections of 2002 and 2006. A summary of Democrat votes by urban/suburban type is shown in the table below:

County type	2000	2004	Change	2002	2006	Change
Core	66.8	68.2	1.4	73.0	74.6	1.6
Inner suburb	53.3	54.9	1.6	50.8	55.5	4.7
Mature suburb	57.7	52.7	-5.0	50.1	54.5	4.4
Emerging suburb	46.4	40.0	-6.4	37.3	43.6	6.3
Exurb	40.9	38.3	-2.6	32.9	41.8	8.9

Table: Percentage Democrat Vote by County Type. For presidential elections in 2000 and 2004 and for House elections in 2002 and 2006.⁵¹

What the results table seems to show is that for both the presidential elections and the House elections, there is a pattern of votes for the Democrats related to the urban/suburban location of the voters roughly corresponding to connection with the city and urbanisation. The categorisation of locations reflects the connection to the core city, population change and the concentration of population. A stronger connection to the core urban centre and higher population density seems to be

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ This table brings two tables together found in the original. Ibid.

positively correlated with the Democrat vote. This shows a complex picture of suburban voting not generally connected to race and the limits of seeing suburbia as a whole as Republican. These factors, as a politics of space, and the perceived connection to policy seem to say more about the electorate than perceived racial outlooks. In particular, one factor, reflected in the House election votes, is that exurbs and emerging suburbs – or the “suburban edge” – can show a fair degree of volatility in their connection to party support. While as of writing the authors have not produced figures for the 2008 election it seems clear that there are a wide range of factors outside of race that apply to these voters who represent a large section of the overall electorate. This is not to suggest that demography is destiny, but rather there may be important connections between political support and a complex range of changing suburban interests. The politics of space brings into question the perception of white racism as a central determinant for such voters.

Several authors have noted the white vote did not go to Obama: Obama lost the white vote in 2008. The 2008 election results showed 55 per cent of whites voting for McCain (almost 60 per cent of men and 53 per cent of women) and “Obama won the white vote in only 19 of 50 states and the District of Columbia”.⁵² However, where issues of social mobility, tax and welfare are seen through a simple prism of white racial outlooks irrespective of content this means economic rationales and the complex politics of location can be ignored or buried and the politics growing out of these changes can go unnoticed.

Dog Whistle Politics?

⁵² Robert Newby, “The ‘New Majority’ Defeats White Nationalism? Assessing Issues of Race and Class in the Obama Presidency”, *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2010): 374-375.

From our analysis, the idea that coded racial appeals, or “Dog Whistle” politics, has become important does not hold water. The idea of playing on underlying racial prejudice does not match a polity where racial politics have become much less vital. Instead it might be said that the argument that “Dog Whistle” politics lie behind Republican politics and various political stances becomes an attempt to dismiss political opponents as promoting racial prejudice and condemn the arguments being put forward by association. For example the recent book by López, has it that such coded appeals play on *all* our unconscious fears.⁵³ In this reading rather than looking to winning political support for liberal ideas, López dismisses opposition as a product of subliminal brainwashing that taps into latent racism. Calling out racism when opponents make the case strongly that they are against racism seems disingenuous. Such “you are racist” name-calling seems to limit understanding and the possibility of dialogue. Our reading of race historically suggests a different reading of the racial stakes at play in the 2008 election. From our perspective there are clear grounds to question the claim of changes in political support based on racial prejudice.

⁵³ Ian Hanley López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). E-book.

Chapter 8: Identity Politics

This chapter uses the concept of identity politics to attempt to explain the centrality of Obama's racial identity to considerations of the meaning of the election. There are a variety of sources used in this chapter. On the theory of identity politics, Bell's early theoretical analysis of affirmative action remains pertinent.¹ This is shown using the recent substantial discussion on the subject by Fraser and Honneth.² The main source for understanding why and how President Nixon's instigated affirmative action is Yuill³ who is used to explain the way that Nixon dealt with race through bureaucratic means and the connection this had to the political difficulties of liberalism. Yuill's analysis also usefully avoids getting caught up in the Democrat/Republican politics of the Nixon's use of affirmative action. Lasch-Quinn is used in discussing the therapeutic form of the contemporary response to race. Although the approach used by Lasch-Quinn is in fitting with the points the thesis wants to make, the shifting forms of therapeutic intervention would suggest that there needs to be some updating of the work.⁴ Skrentny remains the key author on affirmative action and the work on racial realism shows he remains sensitive to changes in the management of race. In discussing Clinton, Kim's work provided a clear analysis of the duplicity involved that was readily incorporated into the thesis.⁵

¹ Daniel Bell. *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1999 [1973]). Ebook.

² Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003)

³ Kevin L. Yuill, *Richard Nixon and the Rise of Affirmative Action: The Pursuit of Racial Equality in an Era of Limits*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

⁴ Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Race Experts: How Racial Etiquette, Sensitivity Training, and New Age Therapy Hijacked the Civil Rights Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

⁵ Claire Jean Kim, "Managing the Racial Breach: Clinton, Black-White Polarization, and the Race Initiative", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 117, No. 1 (2002).

Obama's racial identity was at the centre of the 2008 election. The main responses to problems of race in the election were framed through and seemingly fixated on racial representation. It seemed that race as discussed did not raise issues of equality for blacks per se, but rather centred on the candidate's racial background and the presentation and reception of that background. That the candidate was black has been taken as an important motivation for his supporters and the enthusiasm shown in the election. As noted in the previous chapter that many non-black voters would support a black candidate might show that racially prejudiced outlooks no longer predominated. In addition the way in which Obama's campaign consciously minimised references to his racial background was considered by many as an expression of a political approach that moved past race, an aspect of a "post-racial" politics – although, of course, his best-selling autobiography and the commentary on his racial background may have made up for some of these omissions. And much was made of the extent to which, or even whether, Obama should be considered as being black.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream was famously that a man would be judged not by the colour of his skin, but by the content of his character. In the 2008 election this clearly was not the case. Obama's skin colour was part of how he was judged and how the election was judged through the reaction to his blackness. Even where notably skin colour went unmentioned this was considered important for *not* being made note of by the election's competitors. At least in part it was not mentioned because of how sensitive matters of race were. But as Obama said of his racial background, the electorate had "probably noticed".

Demands for equality or for measures aimed at equality which in the past were raised by activists such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr. were, in

2008, noticeable by their absence. In contrast to the discussion of representation there was little in the way of a discussion of a programmatic response to the problems of racial inequality. It is by no means straightforward that the appropriate response to the material and other disadvantages faced by blacks was one of changed racial representation in the shape of (the body of) a black candidate. Given the relative disadvantages in wealth, employment and many other areas of life that the black population faces, it is unclear how the colour of the president's skin might be considered to substantially address the racial divide. Rather, policy responses aimed at disadvantages in housing, employment and in the criminal justice system would seem more appropriate. This might, for example, include measures to encourage investment in the cities. The reaction to the difficulties of white European immigrants in the twentieth century came not in the shape of a president from a euro-ethnic background, but rather as a series of measures such as the GI Bill, infrastructure programmes, and federal support on housing. In the 2008 election Obama was at pains to make it clear that his programme included no specific policy responses aimed at the difficulties blacks face or at racial inequality.

This chapter attempts to explain the focus on Obama's race and on representation through the idea of "identity politics". The term is, itself, controversial. Gosse, for example, argues that "identity politics" has "turned into a meaningless pejorative" and is better described as "democratic politics". His argument is that identity politics describes, albeit in a way that is meant to disparage, a flowering of political involvement by disadvantaged groups. In his view:

the coming forward of new political communities claiming their own social, cultural and political identities constitutes the birth of *a new democratic order*,

which in the early twenty-first century is reaching maturity after a generation defending the fragile egalitarianism catalysed by the New Left of 1955-75⁶

However, the contention of this chapter is that describing politics organised around identity as being democracy at work is inadequate. Identity politics deals with people not simply as members of the polity or of the demos – as individuals – but rather as persons of a particular identity (as black, as women, etc.). This is not simply democracy extended, but amounts to a qualitative change. Furthermore, in many ways identity politics marks a retreat from democratic politics – a point which is discussed later in the chapter.

The concentration on matters of representation and recognition can be understood as arising out of the political difficulties of the 1960s and has expanded in scope from that period. In an attempt at ameliorating or diffusing problems, racial differences and racial groupings have been taken into account in political, legal, and institutional settings both by the state and the private sector and have become central for many political campaigners. This is a departure from previous attempts at dealing with race which in contrast attempted to bring equality by ensuring that differences such as racial identity played no part in how people were judged and treated, especially by institutions. The attempt to deal with, or perhaps manage, race divorced from a substantial programme to tackle material and social divisions expressly takes race into account. The regnant view of racism as in large part a psychological phenomenon has prompted interventions that attempt to deal with whiteness as an

⁶ Van Gosse, “Postmodern America: A New Democratic Order in the Second Gilded Age” in Van Gosse and Richard Moser (eds.), *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 7.

identity and the problematic racial attitudes associated with it.⁷ Consequently, identity politics brings with it new forms of consciousness of and about race. To some extent it can be said to have renewed racial thinking in novel ways. As we will argue an important part of the meaning ascribed to Obama, as black presidential candidate, rests on the approach that matters of identity, representation and even recognition are what is at issue in racial politics today in contrast to approaches that might attempt to overcome and abolish racial difference and distinctions.

The Strange Origins of Identity Politics

Most commonly identity politics is understood as coming from the left. It has become associated with the Democrats and often painted as an aspect of liberatory politics. However, it is with Nixon in the late 1960s onwards that the taking into account of group differences is established. The connection between identity politics and Nixon is not introduced here as an attempt to establish guilt by association with a controversial right-wing president. Rather, it helps to bring out how the concentration on identity happens as a means of dealing with problems when old ideas of overcoming inequality do not seem plausible. In this period its connection with managing in what Yuill calls “an era of limits”⁸ can be brought out as opposed to the often assumed connection with liberation. In dealing with the collapse of the liberal project, a key strategy adopted by Nixon was to attempt to reorient politics as a mechanism to address group grievances. This, for example, made recognition of racial background part of federal policy. With Nixon came the first large-scale

⁷ See Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Race Experts: How Racial Etiquette, Sensitivity Training, and New Age Therapy Hijacked the Civil Rights Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

⁸ Kevin L. Yuill, *Richard Nixon and the Rise of Affirmative Action: The Pursuit of Racial Equality in an Era of Limits*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

programme of affirmative action and the framework and model for subsequent affirmative action programmes.

The difficulties of liberal politics in the 1960s went well beyond the racial outlook of whites and a racial backlash to civil rights. In the space of a few short years there seemed to be the collapse of a political approach. At the start of the 1960s there was the search for problems to resolve, but by the decade's end there seemed instead a series of intractable difficulties. In the early 1960s, JFK was casting around for domestic issues left to address. He asked Walter Heller, the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors: "I want to go beyond the things that have already been accomplished. Give me facts and figures on the things we still have to do. For example what about the poverty problem in the United States?"⁹ However, by the close of the decade the liberal agenda seemed exhausted. While the Civil Rights movement had pushed Jim Crow segregation to collapse in the South, the situation in the Northern cities seemed bleak and explosive, with widespread rioting a feature of the political calendar. Meanwhile the economy had slowed, Vietnam was a quagmire and youthful revolt eschewed the accommodations of liberal politicians and brought into question the moral compass and culpability of previous generations.

Coming to power at the end of this tumultuous decade we can see that the problems that Nixon was addressing were not limited to building a base around racial prejudice, but rather more generally attempting to salvage something from the wreckage of the liberal collapse. As Matusow notes the Republicans had been

⁹ The choice of poverty was not accidental and did not originate with JFK: several authors had "rediscovered" poverty in the early 1960s. See Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009 [1984]), 119. In the 1950s juvenile delinquency was "one of the few social problems of widespread concern". *Ibid.*, 107.

elected in 1968 “not to repeal social programs but to make them work”.¹⁰ As Yuill has it: “Nixon might fairly be viewed as the reluctant saviour of the postwar liberal order.”¹¹ For example, this meant that Nixon, through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in three years built housing for 1.3 million lower income families which was “more than all previous administrations combined”.¹² However, the problems Nixon faced could not simply be addressed by federal intervention. Attempts at tackling problems more broadly had been tried in the War on Poverty and failed partly because the measures did not match up to the problems and partly because of a lack of institutional backing such that they were often captured by existing political players.¹³ Further there seemed little possibility of rebalancing the effect of the decades where the most dynamic growth occurred around suburban locations. More broadly there was an ebbing away of support for liberal policies.

Perhaps the feature of the period that best demonstrated the difficulties there were was that from the sons and daughters of the establishment, a New Left emerged on university campuses that rejected the approach of the political class on race, war, women’s rights and morality more generally. Kazin argues “the populism of what its adherents called, simply, the Movement was unique. Never before in the United States had a radical upsurge that sought to win power for the common folk sprung from within the dominant order itself.”¹⁴ One might question their connection to “the common folk” and Kazin’s inclusion of the New Left as part of the history of populist politics. However, that these rebels came out of the liberal order and its limitations was clear. Kazin cites a psychologist writing in 1968 who surveyed the New Left as

¹⁰ Ibid., 233.

¹¹ Yuill, *Richard Nixon*, 5

¹² Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, 233.

¹³ See Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, Chapters 8 and 9.

¹⁴ Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), chapter 8. Ebook.

noting that their rebellion came with “no fundamental change in core values”.¹⁵ In taking up these liberal values the New Left was not simply motivated by an alienation from what were seen as unprincipled politicians but also from much of the white public. The alienation was such that a “counter culture” developed and the New Left looked to black militant politicking for a lead in its contrast to the comfort and bourgeois respectability of whites.¹⁶ Here the politics of identity as, for example, represented by Black Power seemed more possible than a politics of equality that would engage with whites more generally and reflected alienation from the “mainstream”, that is the “white” core of American identity.

Initially Nixon’s approach to race was influenced by Johnson’s previous initiatives and by attempting to do something to quell the rioting in the ghettos of many Northern cities, to bring some sense of order. One measure taken was the Philadelphia Plan – based on a Johnson administration plan that was never implemented.¹⁷ This is considered to be the first major affirmative action programme. It was aimed at the inner-cities and at employment in construction and was followed by numerous “hometown” plans along the same lines in many American cities. However, this plan and its spin-offs were not particularly successful. They came with weak enforcement and were met with obstruction by the unions – one aspect of such plans that appealed to Nixon was undoubtedly that they potentially set two groups in the Democrat coalition, blacks and unions, against one another. The hammer blow to the approach was that just as it was implemented there was a marked slowdown in the construction industry.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Dennis Deslippe, *Protesting Affirmative Action: The Struggle Over Equality After the Civil Rights Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), chapter 2. Ebook.

It was subsequent to this, however, that Nixon's main contribution to affirmative action took place and where Nixon essentially setup the framework through which subsequent programmes acted. By 1970 the rioting in the cities had subsided. With this quieting, Nixon's approach shifted from attempts to do something about the ghetto to measures that might help develop the black middle class – as Nixon put it a shift from helping the “weak” to helping the “strong”.¹⁸ This was in part done because it was expected to be more successful and so would prevent attacks on the administration's civil rights record. There were a number of measures that came together to form affirmative action. In Spring 1969, Executive Order 11246 – signed by Johnson for anti-discrimination measures in procurement in the shape of non-discriminatory practices in hiring and employment for suppliers – was expanded to be understood as being for all those taking federal aid, loans or grants.¹⁹ In November 1969, Executive Order 11478 was put in place for federal managers – who previously worked on a strict merit system – to institute plans to combat discrimination through affirmative action hiring. This led to a large increase in minority hires among federal employees.²⁰ Also, in 1969 money was earmarked for the Office of Minority Business Enterprise operating under the Small Business Act to give loans to minority owned enterprises. It started slowly but expanded rapidly: in 1975 the agency gave out \$651 million in loans.²¹ In October 1972 ostensibly to decentralise federal spending and reinvigorate local democracy Nixon put forward what he called a “New Federalism”. This was a system of block grants to the states, described as “revenue sharing”. It replaced monies which had previously been dispersed through federal agencies directly to various groups as part of the War on

¹⁸ Yuill, *Richard Nixon*, 174.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 160-162.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 162-163.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

Poverty. The block grants came with a newly centralised set of “nondiscrimination” clauses and auditing on minority employment. The consequence was to greatly expand the effect of EO 11246.²² This, says Yuill, partly because of the diffuse criteria on anti-discrimination, created a “self-interested affirmative action industry of experts and interpreters who in turn propagated affirmative action”.²³

Nixon had largely avoided legislative change, working instead through executive authority. He had also removed the onus on the federal authorities to be held to account for previously identified problems such as poverty or civil rights. This meant that what had been public issues were delegated and civil rights issues became the subject of negotiations on targets at the state level between officials. As Yuill notes the effect of auditing for equal opportunity requirements undercut civil rights activism and marked a shift from public campaigning to bureaucratic enforcement:

New Federalism ... removed civil rights issues from the public forum by setting them up as non-negotiable, formalized requirements attached to federal monies. In doing so it effectively froze the movement for civil rights reforms. Percentages would be negotiated away from the public eye and enforced quietly.²⁴

Nixon had pragmatic reasons to attempt to take the edge off black unrest and to be able to defend his record on civil rights. By adjusting federal hiring policies and attaching equal opportunity targets to federal monies he could ameliorate black anger at least by providing opportunities for middle class blacks. However, this was something quite different from a political response that campaigned for equality.

²² Ibid., 167-169.

²³ Ibid., 169.

²⁴ Ibid., 167.

Rather these were bureaucratic measures which could be put in place without the need to win popular support.

It should be noted that Nixon was not entirely cutting against the grain in promoting black identity. Nixon at times explicitly looked to a distinct black cultural awareness and identity as support and as a connection. In a well-known appeal for black support he said:

What most of the militants are asking for is not separation, but to be included in – not as supplicants, but as owners, as entrepreneurs – to have a share of the wealth and a piece of the action. And this is precisely what the Federal central target of the new approach ought to be. It ought to be oriented toward more black ownership, for from this can flow the rest – black pride, black jobs, black opportunity and yes, black power...²⁵

Many commentators have taken this speech and associated approaches as an attempt to defuse political radicalism by channelling energies through black capitalism. This is no doubt true. But as Manning Marable, the eminent historian of civil rights, notes, there was already a “fundamentally pro-capitalist thrust of many Black Powerites.”²⁶ Black Power “was not a coherent ideology”²⁷ Rather it was the product of a confused time when “the black community stood as a conglomeration of often contradictory interests and directions, dubiously tied together by a common mood which combined centuries of anger with new hope, increasing desperation with new confidence.”²⁸ Black Power stands in a tradition of the black community looking

²⁵ Richard Nixon cited in Manning Marable, *Race Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 96.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 97

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

to its own cultural and material resources in the face of the lack of opportunity – and lack of integration. Nixon’s interests dovetailed with that approach and he looked to harness these aspirations.

In addition to developing the framework for affirmative action, it could also be argued that Nixon set the parameters for the right’s response to affirmative action through developing the idea of the “silent majority”. In grappling with the problems of liberal collapse Nixon was facing what Yuill calls, citing Habermas, a “crisis of legitimacy”. Here the politics that rested behind political leadership and state policy seemed exhausted. This was a problem for Nixon not just in establishing a base of support for future electoral success, but also in attempting to get whatever support he could for government authority. On 3 November 1969 in a televised address on Vietnam, Nixon called on the silent majority, as against the minority engaged in protests, to support his strategy for the “best way to end [the war].”²⁹ The speech had an enormous resonance; letters flooded into the White House in support. However, that Nixon spoke of the silent majority reflected that this group had little in the way of a programme or active connection to existing political approaches. There was something fundamentally defensive about painting people in this way which reflected an inability to project values and provide leadership that inspired. As Yuill notes, this speech “made a virtue out of inaction, passivity, and disengagement, qualities that had been condemned as vices in prior decades.”³⁰ Their existence did not signal active support but rather unease and frustration at developments. This was Nixon

²⁹ Richard M. Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam” 3 November 1969, accessed 16 April 2015,

http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forkids/speechesforkids/silentmajority/silentmajority_transcript.pdf

³⁰ Yuill, *Richard Nixon*, 224.

innovating into existence, inventing, a constituency.³¹ Nixon's response to the crisis of legitimacy could be seen, as Yuill argues, as an attempt to redefine the problem of economic slowdown and the inability to resolve the major problems the nation faced. Here political leadership might be replaced with a set of complaints, and here a new set of complainants and grievances, that could, perhaps, be addressed one by one and so made more manageable. Thus, Nixon was attempting to put in place a new set of relationships not just with blacks but also with citizens more generally.

A "New Principle of Rights"

Skrentny, perhaps the key writer on affirmative action, says that what compelled his interest in the subject was a point made by Daniel Bell in his 1973 book *The Coming Post Industrial Society*.³² Looking at affirmative action, Bell notes that "what is extraordinary about this change [to affirmative action] is that, *without public debate* an entirely new principle of rights has been introduced into the polity."³³ This was fascinating for Skrentny as, "It was an apparently anomalous policy victory for a group usually assumed to be far from the center of power. How did it happen? It seemed a fantastic sociological puzzle."³⁴

Skrentny's puzzle is partly solved in that the apparent policy victory is at best ambiguous. While there are material gains for some blacks, this is in the context of

³¹ With less silent constituencies Nixon had more difficulties. When in May 1970 construction workers in New York broke up an anti-war rally and later demonstrated in support of the Vietnam war effort this was met with great relief for the embattled administration and was followed by a sustained period of courting union support. Nixon was reported to have said, "Thank God for the hard hats!" As Republican president and given his anti-communist past these were not natural allies. Ultimately though such overlap of interests was limited and could not translate into longer-running or broader support. See Jefferson Cowie, "Nixon's Class Struggle: Romancing the New Right Worker, 1969-1973", *Labor History*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2002): 257-283

³² Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1999 [1973]). Ebook.

³³ Cited in John David Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action: Politics, Culture, and Justice in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), ix-x.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

managing race relations as an accommodation with racial divisions. As Bell argues there is a retreat from attempting to overcome discrimination and bring blacks fully into the American mainstream. There was an abandoning of an approach based on equality and substituted in its place the goal of representation and recognition, such that:

the principle has changed from discrimination to representation. Women, blacks, and Chicanos are to be employed, as a matter of right, in proportion to their number, and the principle of professional qualification or individual achievement is subordinated to the new ascriptive principle of corporate identity.³⁵

The attempt to gain support for policies aimed at equality was bypassed. Legal mechanisms substituted for politics through the subversion of legal norms of equality. Identity politics and group differences became incorporated into the legal system and into the approach of the federal state.

The approach of basing policy on group membership was a turnaround from previous attempts at tackling inequality and ran counter to the ideas behind those attempts. Bell's views on this are worth quoting at length. Bell argues:

The historic irony in the demand for representation on the basis of an ascriptive principle is its complete reversal of radical and humanist values. The liberal and radical attack on discrimination was based on its denial of a justly earned place to a person on the basis of an unjust group attribute. That person was not judged as an individual, but was judged—and excluded—because he was a member of a particular group. But now it is being demanded that one must

³⁵ Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. Ebook.

have a place primarily because one possesses a particular group attribute. The person himself has disappeared. Only attributes remain. The further irony is that according to the radical critique of contemporary society, an individual is treated not as a person but as a multiple of roles that divide and fragment him and reduce him to a single dominant attribute of the major role or function he or she plays in society. Yet in the reversal of principle we now find that a person is to be given preference by virtue of a role, his group membership, and the person is once again “reduced” to a single overriding attribute as the prerequisite for a place in the society.³⁶

The taking into account of group membership and status when dealing with individuals is no small matter. The idea of “equality before the law” or that “justice is blind” are not trifling precepts. Changing these relationships might in some ways be considered a philosophical matter, but it speaks to an altered, and in some ways diminished, relationship of the individual and of the political class to politics, to the state and to the social world.

The introduction of politics based around racial groups albeit ostensibly with the aim of redressing historic injustice signalled a very different kind of politics from that associated with the Civil Rights movement. In this changed politics there are shifts in focus, sensitivities and understanding from individual to groups, from rights to representation, from public to private attributes, from political remedies to legal ones, from culture as incidental to being central, and from gaining democratic support to enacting bureaucratic measures. Individuals were to be considered at least partly on the basis of their pre-established, given group membership. Rather than political campaigning around racial equality, private litigation removed much of the need to

³⁶ Ibid.

attempt to build political coalitions with others. Bureaucratic manoeuvring for resources could often become a stand-in for a democratic orientation that relied on getting support from others to effect change.

The separation of powers in the USA, especially, allowed for an approach that bypassed the need to win popular support. In the US context, responsibility for controversial policy on race could be shifted away from representative bodies. Thus measures were taken through executive action and made subject to bureaucratic enforcement. Additionally much of civil rights legislation rested on private litigation and depended on judicial support. Fukuyama, in a broad critique of US governance, calls this the “judicialization of government” where the form of enforcement of civil rights was by an “explosion of opportunities for litigation [which] gave access and therefore power to many formerly excluded groups, beginning with African Americans.”³⁷ Often civil rights measures were done under the aegis of an activist judiciary rather than stemming from political leadership. The political parties could delegate controversial questions of civil rights to the courts as a way of distancing themselves from responsibility. There was no sense of campaigning for the support of whites for measures that might aid equality. To take one example, in 2003 a judge declared that affirmative action measures would remain in place for the next 25 years. After 35 years of affirmative action the judge decreed that in a matter of another generation there would have been racial redress. This demonstrates how matters of civil rights in what should be political decisions had been farmed out to the judiciary.³⁸ The argument for race conscious policy, it can be argued, has undermined those who believe in equality and undermined the idea of gaining broad

³⁷ Francis Fukuyama, “Decay of American Political Institutions”, *The American Interest*, 8 December 2013, accessed 14 April 2015, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2013/12/08/the-decay-of-american-political-institutions/>

³⁸ Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History...*, 215

support for a politics that seeks to overcome racial divisions. Over time affirmative action has become something of an article of faith on the left and in liberal US circles.

In passing we should note that the idea of recognition used in identity politics sets it against the normative principles of recognition found previously and which have been a feature of modern capitalist societies. Here we need to distinguish the idea of recognition found classically which relates to the individual and that based on group characteristics. As Axel Honneth argues in the debate with Nancy Fraser on the question of “Redistribution or Recognition?”, contemporary societies have it that it is “right” to give recognition to individuals through the three principles of: love (i.e. relationships such as the family); legal equality; and merit or esteem based on one’s part in co-operative labour. Honneth has it that even struggles for wealth or redistribution are, at base, about recognition. This is because any sense of injustice relates to the lack of recognition for one’s labour or one’s worth as a human being based on the contribution to society as one understands it. Honneth’s argument may perhaps collapse distinctions between economics and politics to which different rules apply. Nonetheless, his point that reactions to economic situations vary greatly with political and cultural outlooks has merit. (A sensitivity that he argues is part of a “properly ‘differentiated’ account of recognition.”)³⁹ However, notably Honneth rejects the argument that there is a basis for a new principle of recognition based on group attributes. He argues that “the majority of identity-political demands can be meaningfully grasped only as expressions of an expanded struggle for legal

³⁹ Nancy Fraser, “Distorted Beyond All Recognition: A Rejoinder to Axel Honneth” in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), 199

recognition”⁴⁰ linked as it is in his view to the idea of legal equality. Honneth argues that where claims for recognition are based on ascribed group identities that these just do not make sense. However, Honneth misses – or at least turns a blind eye towards – how, outside his categories, there has been a decline in demands for equality and rather claims made based on novel criteria based on the rejection of the legal equality of individuals based on group characteristics. Ultimately in this new recognition there is an undermining of subject formation, with individuals limited to such group characteristics, and a diminished interaction with others based on the fixed character of identities and the difficulties in communication supposedly between different groups. The particular group identities lined up for recognition are set up in contradistinction to possible universal communication or outlooks.

Initially, opposition to affirmative action came from several sources. Deslippe notes that it was labour unions and “colorblind” liberals, not “colorblind” conservatives, which led early opposition to affirmative action. These groups filed lawsuits, lobbied and campaigned to limit affirmative action. He argues that such groups cannot be dismissed as defending white privilege as they had a number of motivations to oppose “reverse discrimination” including the desire for wider changes that might bring equality.⁴¹ Deslippe makes the case that the decline of such groups was because they were unable to “gain a foothold in a Democratic Party” as the Democrats moved away from “ambitious legislative spirit characteristic of the New Deal and Great Society years”⁴²

⁴⁰ Axel Honneth, “Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser” in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), 170.

⁴¹ Dennis Deslippe, *Protesting Affirmative Action: The Struggle Over Equality After the Civil Rights Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), chapter 1. Epub version.

⁴² Ibid.

Over time as opposition to affirmative action from the left and from liberals fell away, the clearest opposition came from the right. Nixon had set the blueprint for a white constituency seen to be victimized by change. It was a short step to setup affirmative action as a slight to such whites. The reaction from the right was not because primarily it undermined the individualism of the Constitution or undermined ideas of equality or equal opportunity. Rather the predominant reaction from the right to programmes such as affirmative action was cultural. As Skrentny puts it:

The Right's resistance ... is rooted not in a plain belief in equal opportunity over equal rights nor in a more sound Constitutional ground, but in the peculiar *cultural* logic of an American moral model.⁴³

In other words affirmative action has been opposed on the right largely because it runs counter to the idea that hard work should be the measure of success, a cultural norm, rather than because it was at odds with individual liberty. The opposition was based not on the general idea of unfairness, though elements of this argument appear, but on the perceived weakening of the link between work and rewards. As Deslippe argues this view “emphasized market forces and meritocracy”⁴⁴ and “refused to accept the proposition that underlying structures of inequality had persisted in a significant way after the demise of Jim Crow”⁴⁵ The reaction to affirmative action took the form not of a demand for equality but of the argument that whites were victimised by affirmative action measures. Here such “hard-working” families were identified as a constituency in the mould of Nixon’s silent majority. Thus, the normative cultural associations of hard work rather than universal

⁴³ Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action*, 2.

⁴⁴ Deslippe, Chapter 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

approaches such as equality were brought to the fore. It thus became a sectional complaint rather than support for a universal question of principle.

Clinton Figuring as the First Black President

To give a sense of how powerful a representational politics around identity became the chequered history of Bill Clinton on race is instructive. Clinton's campaigning and subsequent presidency provides something of a case study on the workings of identity politics. Clinton both engaged in racial signalling on black crime and enacted legislation which seemed against black interests. Clinton made a series of what would be described as racial appeals, put through legislation hostile to those on welfare many of who were black urban residents, and instituted a law and order crackdown which contributed to, and the legacy of which has been, the mass incarceration of young black males. However, despite this record through largely symbolic measures that linked with and impacted on the recognition and representation of blacks, he was, by the end of his second term, able to present himself in such a way that he gained enormous popularity among blacks and was considered, by Toni Morrison for example, as "the first black president".

Kim charts the way in which Clinton attempted to maximise his appeal to blacks and whites and how it changed over time. She notes that Clinton had:

first, an initial electoral strategy of courting white support, in part through the symbolic rejection of blacks; and second, an adjusted governing/reelection strategy of pleasing whites with substantive action on racial policy issues and placating blacks with largely symbolic gestures of support.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Claire Jean Kim, "Managing the Racial Breach: Clinton, Black-White Polarization, and the Race Initiative", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 117, No. 1 (2002): 57.

In his first presidential campaign Clinton was keen to avoid the way in which Dukakis' campaign had been undermined by race in 1988. An infamous election ad which used the image of a black convict, Willie Horton, who committed crimes while on a weekend furlough pass from jail, was used to link Dukakis to the image of black criminality. This painted Dukakis as weak on law and order and was seen to cause significant problems for his campaign. Subsequently, on race Clinton was "in certain respects to the right of Bush on racial policy throughout his campaign."⁴⁷ The Clinton/Gore manifesto was the first Democrat manifesto for 30 years not to raise the issue of black inequality – although it did find space to denounce "racial quotas". Additionally in January 1992 Clinton took time out from a busy campaign to sign the death warrant of Rickey Ray Rector a mentally impaired black man convicted of killing a police officer several years earlier. In March he had his picture taken with Senator Sam Nunn in Georgia in front of a group of mostly black convicts. In April 1992 with the Los Angeles riots, Clinton's response highlighted the failings of the "urban underclass" while taking the opportunity to denounce the relatively unknown rapper Sister Souljah for her anti-white comments.

In addition to racial signalling, Clinton put through legislation that had particularly onerous effects on blacks. Once in office Clinton enacted measures cutting back on welfare and cracking down on crime. The 1994 crime bill in particular led to increasing incarceration of blacks by mandatory sentences and "three strikes" rules. The legislation which Clinton supported turned the decimation surrounding the use of crack cocaine visited on the inner cities into longer term damage inflicted on communities whose young men were removed with Draconian sentencing laws. Additionally, the 1996 welfare bill put strict limits on welfare and delegated provision

⁴⁷ Marable, *Race Reform and Rebellion*, 217.

to the states. This included, for example, a lifetime maximum of five years welfare provision.

Nonetheless, throughout the Clinton presidency work was done to shore up black turnout through a series of symbolic measures. The need to do something to get out the black vote would have been a lesson learnt from the Dukakis campaign: the reward for ignoring blacks almost completely for Dukakis was a black turnout of just 44 per cent in the general election.⁴⁸ The symbolic measures included taking a stand on the arson of Southern black churches in 1996 and in appointing a record number of blacks to positions in the administration. And in 1995 Clinton backed affirmative action though stressing the need to reform it. Like many of Clinton's initiatives, this can be understood as being led by polling: a poll in 1995 showed this approach matched 61 per cent of public opinion.⁴⁹ In his second term Clinton made further moves to shore up black support through largely symbolic gestures. This included in 1997 apologising for the Tuskegee experiment and visiting several African nations in 1998 where in Uganda he apologised for slavery.⁵⁰ Most importantly, in 1997 he announced a commission on race: "One America in the 21st Century". The commission was heavily stage-managed by the administration with even potential findings closely polled for public reaction. The final report was researched and written by White House staff. It focused on historic injustices, was mute on unemployment and housing, and featured an anodyne call for the need for

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Kim, "Managing the Racial Breach", 69.

⁵⁰ Kim notes that "in 1997 Clinton considered a House bill apologizing for slavery but then demurred when polls indicated strong white opposition to the bill". Kim, "Managing the Racial Breach", 71.

dialogue.⁵¹ Nonetheless Clinton's approval on race shot up and an autumn 1998 CNN poll showed a 90 per cent approval rate among blacks.⁵²

Clinton's symbolic recognition of blacks proved overwhelmingly successful and consequently black public opinion and various black luminaries provided a bulwark of support during the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Jessie Jackson, for example, visited the White House "to offer spiritual counselling and moral support".⁵³ One black university professor even drew parallels between the move to impeachment and the atmosphere that created the mass lynchings of blacks that took place in the Red Summer of 1919.⁵⁴ Perhaps not all black support can be attributed to what Marable calls "Clinton's platitudes favouring racial advancement", as the economic expansion from 1995-2000 had helped the black middle class and blacks working in manufacturing.⁵⁵ However, such was the strength of the appeal of racial recognition that as the Lewinsky scandal developed author Ismael Reed could describe Clinton as a "white soul brother" and Nobel prize-winner, Toni Morrison, could state of Clinton that "white skin notwithstanding, this is our first Black president."⁵⁶

Clinton's shadowing of public opinion abrogated leadership. It seemed more often than not the "Third Way" was little more than a triangulation between Democrat and Republican positions informed by close polling. Clinton's cynical approach was based on an accommodation to presumed white racial support and the acceptance of and pandering to racial fears. Yet by skilfully manipulating the symbolic appeals to

⁵¹ Kim, "Managing the Racial Breach", 71-77. Kim describes the report as one which could be read in different ways and as such played to both black and white audiences. Marable, for example, describes it as "A detailed analysis of how racial discrimination continued to be a central fact of American life". Marable, *Race Reform and Rebellion*, 234.

⁵² Kim, "Managing the Racial Breach", 78.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Kim, "Managing the Racial Breach", 78.

blacks he could be known as “the first black president”. This perhaps spoke to the desperation of blacks and was in part influenced by the effects of economic growth, but it also showed the how powerful the politics of identity had become.

The Development of Racial Management

The idea of the need to manage race did not just develop at the presidential level. A feature of the 1960s was that the personal became political.⁵⁷ Lasch-Quinn argues that one consequence was that a tranche of “race experts moved in to fill a void created by the collapse of the civil rights coalition and the loss of the clarity of the early movement”.⁵⁸ Rather than look to politics, these “social engineers” in the “Me Decade” saw race as the “entrenched bigotry” of America and attempted psychological interventions orientated to manage inter-personal interactions. The idea was that a new racial etiquette was required for the interactions between racial groups. The entrepreneurs developed forms of racial etiquette which Lasch-Quinn argues helped nurture a hypersensitivity on matters of race in inter-personal interactions. For example the idea that blacks are hyper-sensitive to potential racial slurs sets a formulaic response that undermines real communication between those of different races.

This therapeutic orientation towards social problems was “a new lens through which Americans increasingly came to see racial matters.” According to Lasch-Quinn:

Convinced of the entrenched bigotry of middle America and of their role in its exposure and enlightenment, experts carved out niches for themselves in established fields, like teaching, social work, and psychiatry, and created

⁵⁷ Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Race Experts: How Racial Etiquette, Sensitivity Training, and New Age Therapy Hijacked the Civil Rights Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii.

altogether new professional roles, such as those of interracial etiquette advisers and diversity trainers. Those who aimed their attention at whites sought to combat racism, as manifested in stereotypes and incorrect behaviour. Those who aimed their attention at blacks sought to combat so-called internalized oppression by rooting out the benighted mental habits of racial inferiority as manifested in low self-esteem and identification with mainstream, 'white' norms.⁵⁹

While the various schools of psychology might be seen as fads that ebbed and flowed over time the overall impact was important. In the private sector and in education the therapeutic approach has become particularly influential. This led to a situation where diversity training, argues Lasch-Quinn writing in 2001, "has quietly become the "the most important movement related to race in the 1990s."⁶⁰ By the mid-1990s identity politics had become a divisive force. Gitlin's broadside against identity politics identified how cultural issues had become a battleground for groups attempting recognition especially in education.⁶¹

One key way in which the use of identity has evolved in recent years is a move away from its original justification. Identity politics has in the past been justified as a means to promote equality. In part as a response to criticisms of affirmative action, in an institutional context at least, this is now much less the case. In a comprehensive survey of the post-Civil Rights picture and how race is dealt with, Skrentny argues that there has been a new approach added to how race is managed and viewed:

⁵⁹ Ibid., xii.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 161.

⁶¹ Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995). It should be noted, however, that Fiorina provides convincing evidence that culture war divisions engage activists much more strongly than the electorate more generally. See for example Morris P. Fiorina, and Samuel J. Abrams. *Disconnect: The Breakdown of Representation in American Politics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012).

racial realism. According to Skrentny racial realism “joins but does not supplant, classical liberalism and affirmative-action liberalism” as a de facto form of racial management. The racial realist approach is widespread but has not been fully digested and consequently is “outside our normal thinking about race and work”.⁶² Skrentny describes the three strategies used for dealing with race in the post-civil rights era by how useful they see race is as a concept and by their relationship to justice. In the first strategy, “classical liberalism”, race is seen as neither significant nor useful. In this view race is discounted and organisations should be “colour blind” in the interests of justice. With the “affirmative-action liberalism” approach, race is to be considered as significant in the interests of justice. Outside of being a strategy to increase fairness by addressing injustices race is considered to have no utility. However, in the third increasingly used strategy, “racial realism”, racial difference is seen as something that should be taken into account in its utility for businesses and other organisations. Racial realism differs from the other two strategies in that its goal is not justice. Rather it aims at improved organisational effectiveness. This effectiveness is seen to work in two ways. Through “racial abilities”, racial realism is said to describe the effectiveness of taking racial background into consideration when hiring. This is said to help in dealing with same race clients or markets and also in bringing in novel perspectives, insights and attitudes, even to the extent of particular working habits, to an organisation. The second way that racial realism is said to improve organisational effectiveness is through “racial signalling”. A racial realist approach has it that racial diversity can be used to signal both that an organisation cares and is “modern”.⁶³

⁶² John D. Skrentny, *After Civil Rights: Racial Realism in the New American Workplace* (Woodstock: Oxford University Press, 2014), chapter 4. Ebook.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, chapter 1. Ebook.

There are several reasons for the adoption of this new approach. Skrentny sees some of this new approach as coming from the economic imperative for cheap labour and the drive to exploit the immigrant workforce that came with the opening up of immigration from the mid-1960s i.e. to “find the best worker for the cheapest price”. However, when it comes to the highly skilled and professional workforce he sees racial realism as in large part a reaction to Reagan’s attempts to limit affirmative action laws. With Reagan came a “relaxing of the enforcement of Title VII and affirmative-action regulations”. Consequently,

personnel and human resources professionals in large companies – many of whom worked in ‘equal employment opportunity’ (EEO) offices created to coordinate legal compliance – developed a rationale for their role that no longer hinged on federal enforcement efforts. By the late 1980s, along with consultants and academics, they developed the theory of ‘diversity management,’ which held that racial, gender, and other forms of diversity could be a net positive for an organization if correctly managed.⁶⁴

In other words a racial realist approach in professional employment has become the way in which racial management is justified often in the face of criticisms of the fairness of affirmative action practices and in some cases legal challenges. Notably, argues Skrentny, despite attempts to find support through academic research there is little evidence that racial realist strategies do affect productivity. Skrentny’s point is reinforced by Lynch who notes that despite its use, especially by major corporations,

⁶⁴ Ibid., chapter 1. Ebook.

diversity management is not considered a crucial business issue – and suggests, perhaps, that racial signalling is the most important factor at issue.⁶⁵

Skrentny notes that there is little formally in law to support many of the practices associated with racial realism. Indeed many of the practices associated with racial realism – for example targeting particular immigrant groups – may be illegal and simply amount to discriminatory hiring practices. Importantly neither the Democrats nor the Republicans have “offered policy leadership on the issue [of racial diversity] in effect ceding the whole issue to the courts”.⁶⁶ And where right-wing legal activists have challenged the use of racial criteria in hiring, they have concentrated on the legal questioning of affirmative action which has been partly curtailed. As an aside, Skrentny argues that the Republican Party – despite Reagan’s loosening of enforcement – “other than practicing a rhetorical politics of racial resentment...have taken little action to retrench civil rights policies, primarily due to a fear of appearing racist and alienating moderate voters”.⁶⁷ Where a limited number of cases have gone to the Supreme Court testing racial realism, the court has supported the practice. It has supported recruitment policies aimed at increasing the number of minorities working for the police in the interests of curtailing social unrest; racial hiring in casting as an aspect of freedom of expression; and, indirectly, via allowing word of mouth recruitment practices that might reinforce a racial profile in the workplace.

Racial realist justifications are not used solely in the workplace. Skrentny notes that within political organisations racial realist justifications for nominating and electing representatives on the basis of racial background have become important. Having diversity within political leadership is seen as helping an organisation be sensitive to

⁶⁵ Frederick R. Lynch, “The Diversity Machine”, *Society*, Vol. 34, No. 5 (1997): 38.

⁶⁶ Skrentny, *After Civil Rights*, chapter 1. Ebook.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, chapter 1. Ebook.

minority interests and to signal to the electorate that it mirrors its constituents and is modern and not prejudiced.

Hollinger argues that “the Obama candidacy was a far-reaching challenge to identity politics”. This was he says reported through two aspects of his presidential campaign: the first “his self-presentation with minimal references to his color”⁶⁸ in contrast to previous black candidates, and the second in the support he gained from millions of white voters. However, it seems rather that these two areas point to a sensitivity towards identity and so its continued relevance. What seems to have changed is that such representation is shorn from much of its connection with equality. Not the problem of the unequal situation of blacks, but rather the outlook and psychological disposition of the various groups of voters seems to what is increasingly at issue.

⁶⁸ David A. Hollinger, “Obama, the Instability of Color Lines, and the Promise of a Postethnic Future”, *Callaloo*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2008): 1033.

Chapter 9: Changing Whiteness

In this chapter we look at the idea of whiteness. Race in the 2008 election was rarely understood directly through the idea of whiteness. However, a key factor connected with the Obama victory was that previous forms of white identity had been brought into question. Examining this allows us to understand important aspects of how race has changed. In particular we examine how there is was an assumption in the election that Obama's candidacy (and then victory) signified the future where whites were to be a minority of the electorate. Further, within our arguments there is an implicit critique of a major aspect of much of the whiteness studies literature. Here we attempt to flesh out this critique.

A note on sources can be made here. A full critique of whiteness is outside the scope of our investigation. However works covering whiteness intersect with the thesis. The thesis has already made use of specific historical works on the development of whiteness: for example when looking at the bid for whiteness on the part of the Irish in the 1850s and in examining the difficulties faced by the waves of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe from the 1890s. We leave aside these as specific investigations here. Rather this chapter engages with more general attempts to deploy the idea of whiteness and the politics that emerges out of opposition to whiteness in the form of what is called white privilege. In the main we have concentrated on several works that attempt to deal with the difficulty of having large racial divisions between blacks and whites and yet also a general hostility towards racism on the part of whites. It has been in attempting to explain this seeming contradiction that several authors have developed ideas such as colour

blind racism and the idea of white privilege which seek to make whiteness something of a general explanation for race.

This thesis has made a great deal of use of the idea of whiteness. However we have used whiteness in specific ways connected with specific historical periods. The main use of whiteness has been in attempting to show how the creation of a combined whiteness was the mechanism used to attempt to overcome divisions of class, nationality and ethnicity in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century. Notably this is not necessarily the whiteness discussed by the whiteness studies school. It was not whiteness in general but particular attempts at establishing whiteness in common between white ethnics and white “natives” through a particular set of means that the thesis has made use of.

It might be seen that whiteness is a useful concept in general because it brings into question a racial category. In the past whiteness has been seen as a norm which has not been contested or interrogated. With this idea people are simply seen as being white, as recognisably white. White could be taken as having *no* values attached as simply being the norm, as being American. Thus for example, African-American or Asian-American are used to describe people but white-American or Euro-American are very rarely used. Or, for example, there is also a role for white ethnicity or national background in the idea of Irish American or Italian American, but the developed, rich types of cultural background that comes with such designations could not be usefully applied to white-American or Euro-American. Whiteness was seen as having no cultural background, perhaps linked with the mass production of consumer commodities which were the product of the development of US capitalism,

or else as being the norm. Opening up the idea of whiteness for discussion allowed social scientists to see how what seems to be a natural category is rather constructed, is artificial and historically contingent. Whiteness is not a natural state, but rather a particular construction, or rather a series of constructions, with a history. With the opening up of the idea of whiteness to study from the 1980s comes new ways of looking at events.

Ahistorical whiteness

With whiteness comes the investigation of a concept that was taken as given, but this can be conducted in different ways. The use of whiteness in this thesis has been done to understand race historically and with sensitivity to the specific uses and meanings of whiteness in particular eras. However, the same cannot be said for its use within the bulk of whiteness studies. While undoubtedly whiteness provides a powerful way of thinking about historical developments, the overuse and generalisations made with the concept have also tended to undercut historical specificity. One pattern for how this works is to establish how whiteness is developed, is created, but with this development complete the description of historical construction comes to an end and then whiteness becomes self-acting: in its essence whiteness remains constant.¹ Once whiteness is established, even should that construction take a considerable period of time, it becomes an ahistorical norm, a force acting outside of historical developments.

While whiteness might be understood as a historical construct, in the development of the idea in whiteness studies this historical element has been undermined. The idea of whiteness has been seen as being so powerful and having operated essentially

¹ See, for example, David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (London, Verso: 2008), Chapter 5 "A Nation Stays White"

unchanged over such a large number of years that it has been understood ahistorically. As Kolchin, writing in 2002 in an early review of whiteness literature, notes, “evident in the work of the best whiteness studies authors” is the treatment of whiteness as “omnipresent and unchanging, deserving attention as an independent force”.² For example, one author, contends that race in the USA should be described through the idea of a “white racial frame”, generally invisible because of assumptions of privilege and superiority, that has been at work for approximately the last 350 years in the USA – from the early days of slavery onwards.³ The whiteness discussed in general is a free-floating phenomenon. In what Kolchin calls a “dualism” within whiteness studies, the idea and power of whiteness is also unmoored from its historical and political context.⁴ What started as an attempt to unmask the ideological character of whiteness has impugned elements of whiteness as having a supra-historical character.

The ahistorical view that lays at the centre of whiteness studies might be seen to be connected with one of the key difficulties for those attempting to understand race in recent years. The seeming contradiction for those studying race in the USA is the combination of a population that decries racism and the continued racial divisions in US society. Whites in poll after poll reject racism. Politics and cultural beliefs suggest that there is a broad, quite intense, and genuine rejection of racial politics. However, the deficit in life chances for blacks as against whites seems to continue unabated. There seems to be a paradox in the combination of on the one hand of a plethora of statistics showing how blacks systematically lag economically and socially, from

² Peter Kolchin, “Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America”, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (2002): 160.

³ Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁴ Ibid.

employment, to incarceration, to education etc., with, on the other, the almost universal protestation of opposition to racism on the part of whites. One, author for example, pithily describes this disparity as “racism without racists”.⁵

Whiteness as explanation for racism

To explain this seeming contradiction whiteness has been employed to fill the gap. In effect whiteness itself comes to be seen as the explanation for racial division. Whiteness in several forms in and of itself has been put forward as an explanation for US racism in the last few years. These interpretations have tended to present whiteness as a powerful ideological framework that lies behind networks of white privilege in such a way that the prejudice is rendered normal and invisible because of its ubiquity. One way this is discussed is as “color blind” racism.⁶ Here belief in equality and equal treatment in the context of the normality of white domination is supposedly such that acceptance of being colour blind i.e. of formal equality, becomes the contemporary form of racial domination. Whiteness in recent years has been seen to consist of the automatic gifting of privileges to whites because they are white. Essentially the idea seems to be similar to being a member of an “old school tie network” where white skin stands in for the old school tie and confers advantages. Further, in this understanding these advantages are taken without conscious reflection. As one author describes this view “white subjectivities function as anchors and relay points for the exercise of racist power that they may neither condone nor even recognize”.⁷

⁵ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 4th ed. (New York: Rowman Littlefield, 2014). [ebook]

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ladelle McWhorter, “Where do white people come from? A Foucaultian critique of Whiteness Studies”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 2005 Vol. 31, No. 5-6, 536

A key idea in this view of whiteness is the idea of privilege. Here it is argued that racial privilege is the motivation for the taking up of whiteness even though this may happen subconsciously. Importantly, this differs from earlier ways of understanding and discussing race in terms of racial discrimination. Discrimination can only be understood alongside the idea of equality. Equality is the norm against which discrimination can be considered and measured. The idea of equal rights and the exercise of these rights might be set against structures and groups that would seek to discriminate i.e. to oppress by denying these rights. In the reading of white privilege, in contrast, the idea of equality is discarded. This is seen to be important because the idea of equality is seen as a mask or cover for injustice. In other words, even as they maintain they are colour-blind, whites make the subtle, subconscious choices that establish white privilege through the passive acceptance of the status quo of white domination. Equality is seen to be the way that “hidden in plain sight”, the privileges of being white are enacted. Equality is, in this view, ideological.

As we have discussed, race in the Obama election was disconnected from the idea of equality. We argued that with the collapse of the civil rights movement, identity politics fills the vacuum and severs the connection of race with equality through the acceptance of racial categories as a means of making claims for resources from the state. The idea of whiteness in its contemporary ahistorical form is also at odds with equality such that where race is discussed it is in the form of a discussion of white privilege where equality does not feature in a positive sense. While the application of this concept of whiteness has not had the broad influence of identity politics with, for example, its application in affirmative action, the vocabulary of privilege has become increasingly common on the left and has been taken up more widely, for example in online discussion where memes that put your opponent on the defensive are at a

premium, opponents are told to “check your privilege”. The concept of white privilege that developed out of whiteness studies is about the identification of racial identities, dismisses the idea of equality and revolves around individual behaviour; clearly the connections are here to see this viewpoint as a contemporary adjunct to and development of the politics of identity.

Alongside the dismissal of equality, the idea of white privilege can be seen as a distancing from, if not a rejection of, the possibility of solidarity across racial lines. Such is the supposed power of white privilege that benefits accrue to all whites. With these benefits for all whites there is an implicit dismissal of solidarity because whites systematically gain from such privileges and, however silently and unconsciously accept them. The lack of political activism attempting to breach the colour divide becomes, in this reading, a feature and consequence of the ideology of whiteness and its power over whites.

It can be noted here that the change from “discrimination” to “privilege” is part of a broader in the vocabulary of contemporary left political activism which has adopted ideas such as “white privilege”. One author provides an interesting comparison of the vocabulary of the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s with what he calls the “post-New Left”, or the “post-1990 activist”, given that this was the period that such changes became pronounced.⁸ He argues that the change in vocabulary is the product of shifts in priorities, focus and emphasis. This post New Left has moved from the previous priority of “ultimate victory” to that of “challenging everyday impacts”; has moved from a focus on systems to “analysing interpersonal dynamics”; and has rejected the emphasis on “commonality among social groups” and instead

⁸ Steve Darcy, “The Rise of the Post-New Left Political Vocabulary”, Public Autonomy.org, 27 January 2014 <https://publicautonomy.org/2014/01/27/the-rise-of-the-post-new-left-political-vocabulary/> accessed 1 August 2016

emphasises specific experience marking “a loss in confidence in the capacity of people to learn about, understand and oppose forms of inequality that do not adversely impact them, as individuals”. This change in vocabulary reflects important moves away from the goal of fundamental change and a shift towards identity politics and the semi-therapeutic targeting of the relationships between individuals and groups, done as activism, that we discussed in the previous chapter.

One key difficulty with the idea of white privilege should be considered. The differentiated experience of whites in the USA should give pause to the idea that all whites benefit in a significant way from their cultural standing. Rather than a combined experience of “white” success as, for example Murray argues, the uniform experience of middle class white progress in the USA has long since passed. There are major differences and major divisions within the white experience of contemporary America.⁹

It should be noted, however, that the discussion of white privilege does not focus in the main on major economic factors such as assets or employment. Where such privileges are outlined they become examples of awkward cultural interactions, interpersonal difficulties, and the making of racial generalisations. Peggy McIntosh’s widely cited article lists fifty examples of what she considers aspects of white privilege that she receives – what she calls an “invisible knapsack of white privilege”. McIntosh’s list is based on her self-reporting on parts of her life that she considers privileges which she would normally be able to take for granted because she is white that may not be available if she were black or in an ethnic minority. The list is dominated by two types of “privilege” which account for roughly 20 of the 50 reported

⁹ Charles A. Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (New York: Cox and Murray, 2012).

privileges, although they overlap to a degree. These two types are in the areas of interpersonal relations and of cultural space.¹⁰ With questions of interpersonal relations McIntosh identifies ways in which whites can take for granted that they are not being judged as representative members of their race or as spokesmen or women for their race. Consequently, she considers herself, as white, to face much less chance of being involved in awkward or potentially hostile misunderstandings. With questions of cultural space, McIntosh uses examples of where she can assume that as white her cultural identity will be catered for, reflected and taken seriously in the cultural spaces she sees around her. Other types of white privilege McIntosh are connected with low level prejudice or else generalisations about economic standing.

All too often the discussions of white privilege seem like exercises in desperately scouring society and social research for whatever advantages might be found or inferred in any sphere, done in an attempt to fill the distance between the scale of these advantages and the scale of the disparity between black and white lives that these advantages are supposed to explain. However, this is not to say that there are some matters of substantial difficulties and divisions when it comes to racial discrimination which are highlighted in this approach. The most substantial is the passing down of assets through generations to white families. This is a function of accumulated wealth in housing assets from the past being deployed today. Wise's argument has merit that assets accumulated by the baby boomer generation of whites, based in large part on their experience of the post-war boom and their access to cheap mortgages, continues to help many young whites today. This can help, for example, in their access to higher education. However, this is by no means

¹⁰ Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege, and Male Privilege. A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies." Working Paper 189, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass., 1988.

universal and represents assets that will be drawn down over time for a great number of white families whenever one of these new generations struggle.¹¹ For blacks who struggle to get opportunities, it is not only the lack of comparative assets of their own to draw on, it is also the lack of contemporary economic dynamic that causes difficulties. Social mobility as measured since the 1970s remains lower in the USA than in Europe, for example. It has been widely noted that there has been especial difficulty for those with few academic qualifications.¹²

One might argue that difficulties of interpersonal contact and of cultural recognition which are the mainstay of lists of white advantage seem to be heightened by the politicisation of racial identities. There is a case to be made that the therapeutic interventions mean that communication can be accompanied by a heightened sensitivity that comes in the self-interested interventions of the race industry. It should also be noted that the idea that whiteness explains contemporary racism retains the focus on the psychology of whites although this has shifted from an examination of conscious reactions to the subconscious.

It seems difficult to match up the privileges under discussion with the enormous disparities in opportunity which accord to different racial groups. The poor facilities in education, lack of job opportunities and poor neighbourhoods that have enormous impacts that might be addressed by public policy do not meaningfully feature on lists of the possibilities of imagined cultural faux pas and interpersonal sleights. Rather than explaining race many of the concerns being discussed seem related to the politics and concerns of establishing racial identities or racialised culture. There is a

¹¹ Tim Wise, *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity* (San Francisco: City lights, 2010), Chapter 1: Post Racial. E-book.

¹² Economist, "Mobility, Measured: America is no less socially mobile than it was a generation ago" 1 February 2014, accessed 1 August 2016, available at: <https://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21595437-america-no-less-socially-mobile-it-was-generation-ago-mobility-measured>

politicisation of cultural spaces that means they become locations for grievances connected with hyper-sensitivity when it comes to matters of race. To see the causes of the racial divide in the psychology of whites, albeit the subconscious psychology, does not explain or address the significant divisions there are. Rather as we will go on to discuss, the resonance for whiteness and “white privilege” might better be understood as arising out of, and being a weapon deployed in the culture wars that have been a feature of US politics since the 1990s.

A historical reading of whiteness

We have examined the general discussion about whiteness and now turn to look at whiteness historically in an attempt to show how it has changed and with those changes comes a changed meaning. In our analysis of the shifting meaning of race, part of the argument is that whiteness has also shifted. In applying a historical and political analysis to the importance race came to have in the USA we have used the concept of whiteness as being central. However, we have attempted to make the case that this is not a timeless category. There are certainly elements of continuity in the use of the idea of whiteness. On the surface the idea of whiteness as a norm or the idea of white superiority has a long history. However, on closer inspection there is a making and remaking of whiteness that brings into question the surface continuity.

For example, we might see distinct periods in creating whiteness in the USA: the campaign to establish whiteness as against black slaves, the campaign by the Irish to become white from the 1850s, and lastly the attempt at incorporating immigrants in a combined white race that developed from the immigration act of 1924 until its culmination i.e. success by the 1970s. We have developed these points in earlier

chapters but they are summarised here for clarity. In the 1700s, as superbly documented by Allen in *The Invention of the White Race*¹³, whiteness was created in response to slave revolts that included both whites and blacks. This whiteness took the form of a series of laws to establish the separation of blacks and whites. In the 1850s, the whiteness of immigrants from the Irish famine was brought into question. Cartoons of the period, for example, show how the Irish were racialised, i.e. they were attributed negative characteristics based on their racial background.¹⁴ While initially in the 1840s there were some attempts at solidarity with blacks this approach was abandoned. This required distancing from blacks which was done through, for example, rioting on the New York waterfront to expel blacks that had worked alongside the Irish. This ultra-loyalty as white brought with it political benefits and a policing role / assimilation role for subsequent waves of white Catholic ethnics. From the 1890s to the 1920s there was a huge influx of white immigration which similarly did not simply fit into being white. The reaction to these immigrants was through nativism. Nativism was only overcome in 1924 with the Immigration Act which again established a combined whiteness and linked that to being American. This did not erase the distinctions between different groups of whites but it was an important start. It was the process of creating white only suburbs that was the main way of destroying the distinctions between whites. Only by the 1970s was there a consolidated white American population. These historical shifts it should be considered are not a feature of subconscious white reactions or interpersonal conflict. Further they suggest that whiteness is a flexible set of ideas that can change over time.

¹³ Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: Vol. 2. The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (London: Verso Books, 1997).

¹⁴ Thomas Nast Cartoons, "Irish Stereotype", undated, accessed 1 August 2016, <https://thomasnastcartoons.com/irish-catholic-cartoons/irish-stereotype/>

At this stage, however, we can identify where there is a further major change, central for our purposes, in how whiteness is understood. Until the 1960s as we have described there were campaigns in place to consolidate whiteness. However, towards the end of this period we can also identify a growing critique and even a hostility to whiteness. From the 1960s there was beginning of a rejection of whiteness as a model of the citizen. This was a rejection of the Cold War conformity associated with whiteness which initially took the form of the counter culture. Already by the 1960s for young people the idea of citizenship connected with whiteness was being replaced with identity politics. For Gitlin, identity politics triumphed because “there was no really compelling alternative to it”. According to Gitlin, “people felt they were more acutely black, or female, or eventually, homosexual or some kind of ethnicity. They felt those identities more acutely than they did citizenship”.¹⁵ In other words the positive identification for that new generation with previous ideas of citizenship often associated with whiteness was withering away. Later this developed into alienation and then hostility towards what was seen as the backwardness and conformity of the whiteness that came with the Cold War and the Post-War boom.

The 1960s saw the widespread rejection of the politics of the Cold War whiteness. Hostility to mainstream white culture has been a feature of elements of the left from at least the 1950s. Subsequently the development of identity politics should also be seen in relationship to a distancing from what is seen as white culture. This is reflected, for example, in the defensiveness – and victim status – of Nixon’s silent majority. This might also be seen, for example, in the attempts to revive white ethnic

¹⁵ Todd Gitlin, "The Eve of Youthful Destruction", Spiked-Online, July 2016, accessed 1 August 2016, <http://www.spiked-online.com/spiked-review/article/the-eve-of-youthful-destruction-todd-gitlin-the-sixties/18503>

forms of identity as against the white mainstream that came in the early 1970s which we discussed in Chapter 7.¹⁶

It was with the early 1990s that this developed further in the form of the culture war. The culture wars describe the way in which identities come to be given political meaning. In developing distinct politicised identities connected to membership of groups connected with gender, race, and sexuality, there is a reaction to white identities which, for example, took the form of hostility towards the “dead white males” whose work was taught in universities. As we have discussed the way in which race is seen targets/identifies white racial identities as complicit and involved in the creation of racial division. Consequently such racial identities as white have been seen as problematic. There is a hostility towards whiteness which is seen as acting to oppress.

The timing of this change be seen in connection with the arrival in academia and other professional locations of what we might call the post-New Left following its long march through the institutions begun in the 1960s. However, it might also be seen in connection with the weakening of the old left undermined by the end of the Cold War and the bringing into question of the old stabilising categories of left and right. By the early 1990s, Gitlin sees in the culture wars especially in education the result of this changing of personnel and the growing challenge to “white” views such as, for example, are seen in the questioning of the Western canon. What were the conveyors of the heights of knowledge became tainted by the racial and imperial context of the societies within which they lived, even, for example, by their domestic arrangements. Gitlin discusses how white views more broadly which previously were

¹⁶ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

credited as positive, by the 1990s had become subject to criticism for their backwardness:

Not so long ago...the straight white male was the American norm. Everyone else was measured, and usually found wanting, by virtue, or vice, of deviance from that norm....Today, the straight white male frequently finds himself on the defensive. He is, like everyone else, a member of a category, the oppressor category at that, scrambling for cultural space while his own prospects seem less than luminous. His intentions with respect to minorities and women may or may not be noble, but he is tempted to declare himself a victim like the victims he deplures.¹⁷

While at the height of the Cold War, whiteness had a solidity and might be connected with a forward-looking population and optimism, this is in strong contrast to how whiteness has increasingly been seen since the 1990s. There is a broad critique of backwardness of many whites especially in regard to their inner racial prejudice. Rather than see continuity in whiteness, there has been a distancing from previous mainstream “white” views.

Indeed, the whiteness studies view of history has become popular in recent years and the key explanation for this might be seen in its connection, at least in its ahistorical formulation, with important political and ideological currents that see themselves as hostile to “white culture”. Consequently whiteness studies can often be found as positioned in contemporary politics on one side of the culture wars. Whiteness studies overlaps with the culture wars in particular with its critique of white culture which is often presented as shallow, inorganic, empty and imbued with racial privilege. Notably the culture wars did not feature explicitly in 2008. Indeed the culture wars – perhaps because they rest on the shifting sands/uncertain terrain of

¹⁷ Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams*, 124.

culture – seem to come and go, and perhaps were on hold given the amount of cultural attention being paid to the Obama campaign and race more generally. However, the questioning of white outlooks taking place in the election might be seen as how the culture wars manifested themselves in 2008 and connected with some of the main themes of the culture wars. In essence by testing mainstream white views for whether they fell in line with what might be called liberal cosmopolitanism, the Obama election might be seen as a skirmish in the culture wars. In a rare unguarded moment on the campaign trail, Obama his suspicions of white culture, and whites, explicit: “They get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren’t like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations.”¹⁸

We should note that in the critique of whiteness, it should be noted, there is a fine line between critiquing white culture and attacking whites. It is unclear, for example, how the whites under question are supposed to simply adopt a different culture or what culture whites are supposed to adopt.¹⁹ Frankenberg’s illuminating interviews with white women show the difficulties many whites face in this cultural critique. As she notes of whites in comparison to those with other racial identities: “there’s still a majority of the country that can’t say they are proud of anything”²⁰ She notes that for white women the “cultural and ethnic belonging in these women’s conceptualization [of white culture] occupied a narrow sphere, remaining rather abstract as signifiers of identity” in comparison to that of others.²¹ Whiteness as experienced by these women vacillated from “‘no culture’ to ‘normal culture’ to ‘bad culture’ and back

¹⁸ Ed Pilkington, “Obama Angers Midwest Voters with Guns and Religion Remark”, Guardian, 14 April 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/14/barackobama.uselections2008>

¹⁹ Olson, 112-114 not cultural id? But what cult then?

²⁰ Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 195.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 208-209

again.”²² As one author discussing the use of whiteness in a pedagogic context notes, there is a nod to the fluidity of culture but nonetheless a fixing of racial cultural types in the discussion of them. This means that “it’s difficult *not* to equate the word ‘whiteness’ – and, by extension, the negative qualities it seems to imply – with ‘white’ people.”²³ Other authors, again in education, when introducing the idea of whiteness to young white people, note that there is what amounts to a “white identity crisis” that comes with the “racialization of white identity” and which leads to “guilt” and “shame” on the part of some whites or else racial anxieties along right-wing lines with others.²⁴

Olson, a whiteness studies author, also identifies that there has been a major change in whiteness. His argument is that this is in the change from “standing” to being a “norm” and is a consequence of the withdrawal of backing by the state i.e. the removal of “official recogni[tion]”/“state sanction.”²⁵ Whiteness is transformed from the attribution of social standing (associated with Jim Crow segregation) to being a norm which is associated with a colour-blind approach on the part of the state. This norm is “natural” in that it operates in a “pre-political” way i.e. the assumptions of privilege that whites make are made outside of political decisions as the “background of social life” and so does not seem to contradict a colour-blind approach. It is with the unearned advantages of being white that do not seem to contradict a belief in equality – indeed which are often unacknowledged privileges.²⁶

²² Ibid., 202

²³ AnnLouise Keating, “Interrogating whiteness, ‘(de) constructing’ race”, *College English* Vol. 57, No. 8 (1995): 901-918, 908

²⁴ Joe L. Kincheole and Shirley R. Steinberg, “Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness: Reconfiguring White Identity in a Pedagogy of Whiteness” in Joe L. Kincheole, Shirley R. Steinberg, Nelson M. Rodriguez and Ronald E. Chennault eds. *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*. (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1998), 10

²⁵ Olson, *Abolition...*, 66

²⁶ Olson, *Abolition...*, 71-72

However Olson misses some key changes. Rather than a colour-blind state, as we argued in Chapter 7, the development of identity politics had a view that undermined formal equality. The attachment to particular racial groupings was made part of how the state operated – and this was done not in support of whiteness but in supporting black identity politics. Further, the norm of whiteness does not come any longer with the attribution of positive characteristics or of the universality of the post-war years. The background of social life does not treat the “norm” of whiteness kindly.

In previous years, the questioning of the white mainstream that might have had radical purpose given the racial ordering that was taking place. Today, however, this critique seems to act as an expression of anti-democratic sensibilities, in particular by dismissing the possibility of whites being able to support reform. Even whites who argue for equality and oppose racial privilege are discounted from having an active role to play: in the vocabulary of contemporary activism they become “allies” that at best cheer on “people of colour” from the sidelines. As Frankenberg argues “whiteness is conceived as axiomatically tied to dominance, to economics, to political structures. In this process, both whiteness and nonwhiteness are reified, made into objects rather than processes, and robbed of historical context and human agency.”²⁷

The trajectory towards a politics hostile to previous white mainstream outlooks is clearer today, perhaps. At certain times since the 1960s it might have seemed plausible that hostility to white culture might be part of opposing the attempted re-establishing of white dominance. For example, in the 1980s it sometimes seemed less than clear whether there might be a revival of “white” bourgeois values. With Reagan the idea that the American dream as it was previously understood might be

²⁷ Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 202.

renewed seemed to have some weight behind it. Reagan's status on the right might be explained in how he seemed able to articulate "white" views as positive. Gitlin writing after the fact suggests that Reagan was selling something of a mirage, in that there was no material or political basis for US renewal. Indeed the military Keynesianism practised by Reagan was owed to the US position internationally rather than being linked to internal moral or economic re-establishment.²⁸

Whiteness declined but more important?

At this point, we should note a seeming contradiction: the whiteness we argue is weakened seems nonetheless to continue to be a key point at issue in the discussions of race, for example. In the thesis we have made the case that whiteness comes a culmination in the 1970s. The drive and power of the idea of whiteness attached to the idea of racial positioning subsequently diminishes. The confidence of whiteness as an identity connected with post-war success is undermined. The idea of whiteness is attacked and culturally it is increasingly dismissed. Nonetheless it seems that in recent years whiteness has retained its importance as a point of reference in discussions of race and as an identity that many retain, or perhaps as Obama might have it "cling to". If whiteness had become less important – was increasingly a veneer – then how do we account for it seeming to retain its importance?

One way this can be explained is that in fixing/establishing a host of racial identities there is a mirrored construction of whiteness as an identity. Whiteness is given more coherence in the culture wars as part of the creation of racial identities which have a strong connection with previous victimisation and so which need whiteness as part of

²⁸ Gitlin, *Twilight of Common Dreams*, 74-79.

their justification. Today this is the creation of whiteness not as the norm of the Cold War period, but rather as the racially prejudiced “Other”. While there has been a long discussion of the ideas of minorities being the “other” to Western norms – we might consider that in short space of time it has become possible for whiteness to act as the “other” to acceptable racial identities. In attempting to mark out cultural space, whiteness still retains sufficient solidity, cachet or meaning, to set oneself in contradistinction to. In the culture wars a diminished whiteness can still act as “bad culture”. Identities linked to membership of ascriptive groups are partly tied together by the “other” of oppressive whiteness.²⁹ Maintaining racialised cultures it seems means existing in a relationship with white culture seen as causing oppression.

Another reason that explains how whiteness continues to seem to have some solidity is that for many it is by no means straightforward to replace it partly because it is unclear what to replace it with. There is the end of the idea of whiteness as a cultural norm connected with progress and a positive social standing attached that was associated with the post-war period. However, this is not to say that there has been the replacement of whiteness as a cultural norm per se. Rather it persists as a norm but is increasingly unconnected with positive traits or dynamics. It is not straightforward for whites to simply adopt a different culture. Further, the adoption of alternatives - of a more politically correct variety – would seem ill-fitting for many. Whiteness then might seem to have more coherence than expected because the alternative of racial/gender/age based cultural identity has little to offer for many.

²⁹ This suggests that wanting to abolish whiteness but not race as Olson argues makes no sense. While Olson, *Abolition*, 67. While races such as Black, Chicano/a, Indian have cultural attributes they are at the same time political identities. It is not simply their cultural attributes that enable them to be used to make claims for resources and to have social standing. It is also that they are in a conflictual relationship with whiteness.

This does not mean that it is possible to champion the idea of whiteness as some sort of revival of the post-war progress. We would suggest that whiteness has elements of instability: it moves from a norm, to no culture to bad culture, as Frankenberg puts it. Calls for black pride might be seen as plausible strategies for social gain and cultural standing. However, calls for white pride definitively are not. Many whites have been able to take on, perhaps drift into or attempt, something of a cosmopolitan or rootless outlook backed by patterns of consumption. Unfortunately, for some pressed on their “whiteness” one reaction can be the adoption of a thin-skinned victimhood of whiteness of the type that Donald Trump seems to exhibit.³⁰

Crisis of liberal politics

The thesis wanted to approach the problem from a US perspective and in particular look at the particular developments of race in the US perspective. The historical twists and turns of US politics when it comes to race have no parallel. The thesis has concentrated on the changes that have taken place in the USA. However another angle which the thesis connects to is the broader changes that came with what seemed to be a collapse in liberal politics. In particular, the thesis did not attempt to explain fully the rejection of mainstream values shown by the New Left and in the culture wars. We noted that for some in younger generations the concerns of race that impinged on previous generations no longer applied and so this new generation found racial politics morally indefensible. We also noted that liberal politics seemed to offer no programmatic solutions and had become alienated from its base. However, the reason behind the broad rejection of liberal politics remains something not fully explored in the thesis. While comprehensively analysing wider

³⁰ Matt Lewis, “Conservatives Must Reject White Identity Politics: The political left pushed whites to take stock of their whiteness”, 25 May 2016, Roll Call. Accessed 1 August 2016, <http://www.rollcall.com/news/opinion/conservatives-must-reject-white-identity-politics>

developments is beyond the scope of our analysis, we might a few words here to tentatively suggest why these rejections of previous liberal values have taken place. The difficulties for liberal politics found here suggest ways to understand how there is a rejection of progress and meaning associated with Cold War whiteness and then the taking up of identity politics rather than a more universalist support for progress shorn of its connection to white racial identity and the limitations of cold War orthodoxies.

One way of approaching the rejection of the liberal politics of the post-war period can be seen in the changes that came with the 1980s and accelerated with the end of the Cold War. Zygmunt Bauman, writing in 2001, noted that the 1980s came with a slew of new theories that suggested politics had changed. For Bauman, ideas such as post-modernity, the end of history, second modernity and surmodernity – “articulate[d] the intuition of a radical change in the arrangement of human cohabitation and in social conditions under which life-politics is nowadays conducted”³¹. These ideas brought into question the ideas of modernity, progress and support for liberal ideas that were at the core of Western society. It may be the Cold War held such ideas together artificially as the Cold War acted to cohere meaning and purpose under threat of extinction, thus partly energising otherwise exhausted institutions.³² With the left and right losing coherence following the end of the Cold War, the meaning associated with liberal institutions was further undermined.

A connected way of approaching the difficulties of liberal politics is the way in which the elites seems to be increasingly alienated from the population in general.

³¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity 2000), p10

³² Zaki Laïdi, *A World Without Meaning*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), 14-16

Alienation from the mainstream might also be interpreted as a rejection of leadership. In 1995 Christopher Lasch, for example, made the case that there had been a “revolt of the elites and the betrayal of democracy.”³³ Or as Peter Mair put it in his posthumous work, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy*³⁴, there has been a “withdrawal of the elites” and a growing indifference to democracy throughout the West. Rather than attempt to lead, elites had positioned themselves as largely hostile to mainstream culture and have where possibly physically separated themselves in gated communities. For Murray the elites were gated off and distanced from the difficulties that a previously stable white middle class were experiencing.³⁵ Furedi argues Murray is describing how the elite “lacks [the] ambition to lead society” and that “one is struck by the calculating and instrumental orientation of this group towards moral norms. It depends on formulaic speech codes, codes of conduct, values and mission statements and ethics committees to regulate its behaviour. Its reliance on process and procedures betrays an absence of trust even amongst its own kind.”³⁶ In other words they lacked the political and intellectual resources, or will, to lead or to attempt to overcome material and moral difficulties. Furedi, in another work, argues that the difficulties of elite leadership and connection with mainstream society shown in the 1960s were echoes of the interwar period where the possibility of a positive support for the market and for bourgeois values were never resolved in the wake of the First World War.³⁷

³³ Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (London: Norton, 1995).

³⁴ Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy*, (London: Verso, 2013).

³⁵ Charles A. Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (New York: Cox and Murray, 2012).

³⁶ Frank Furedi, “The Divided State of America”, Spiked-Online, 30 April 2012, accessed 1 March 2015, available at: http://www.spiked-online.com/review_of_books/article/12384

³⁷ Frank Furedi, *The First World War: Still No End in Sight*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2014).

The demographics of whiteness

We now move on to look at an important way that whiteness became part of the discussion of the 2008 election: through demographics. Obama's candidacy was continuously referenced with the idea that whites were becoming a minority in the USA. Black and ethnic minority voters had become a significant proportion of the electorate. Feagin notes that in 2008 "voters of color" accounted for 26 per cent of the electorate. Obama won a significant majority of the black and ethnic minority vote. In 2008, Obama gained the votes of 95 per cent of blacks, 67 per cent of Latinos and 62 per cent of Asians. This might be compared to 43 per cent of whites.³⁸ Further the number of Latinos and to a lesser extent Asians was rising at a much faster rate than the rest of the population. While in 2008 the proportion of non-whites will be 26 per cent, by 2042 because of immigration and different rates of childbirth it is estimated that this number will be over 50 per cent of the population and whites as presently constituted will be less than half of the population. The bulk of that increase is with Latinos (from 15 to 30%) and some growth from Asians (5 to 9%). Numbers of blacks will roughly stay the same at 13 per cent of the population.³⁹ This is why one name used for the change has been the "browning" of America.

As early as 2002, Ruy Teixeira and John B. Judis predicted these trends in a book called the *The Emerging Democratic Majority* mirroring the earlier Kevin Philips book *The Emerging Republican Majority*.⁴⁰ There is a great deal of complexity in the numbers, turnout rates, political support, urban concentration etc. However the

³⁸ Joe Feagin, "A Racially Polarized Country: White Men Lose One", Racism Review blog, 8 November 2012, <http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2012/11/08/a-racially-polarized-country-white-men-lose-one/>

³⁹ Ruy Teixeira, "is there (still) an emerging progressive majority in the United States", 19 January 2010, accessed 1 August 2016, http://sens-public.org/article.php3?id_article=723&lang=en

⁴⁰ Ruy Teixeira and John B. Judis *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (Lisa Drew: New York, 2002)

argument, because of the large numbers involved, boils down to the point that over the next two or three decades because of immigration and because of different family sizes that Republicans will find it increasingly difficult to win political campaigns unless they manage to get ethnic minorities to support them. Whites used to being the majority it seems, at the level of the numbers at least, will have to adapt to a situation where their interests are not the default.

Obama's particular racial background seems to fit well with this perceived process of change. It is not that Obama is black, rather it is that Obama is mixed race. The idea is that the USA will move to a white minority and that the binary division of race will be replaced with a "hybrid" future:

"Obama's personal family history has raised the recognition of the mixed or hybrid character of American history to a new level. In less than forty years the United States will be roughly equally divided between Whites and people of color."⁴¹

While the longer term trends away from a white majority are clear. The shorter term trends have not been so straightforward as initially thought. One of the co-authors of *The Emerging Democratic Majority* book has questioned some of its conclusions as being too definitive. Judis notes that there for the House and the Senate there was low turnout among non-white voters for mid-term elections, that too many of the Democrat supporters were urban when both House and Senate underrepresent these constituencies, and lastly that the Democrats have lost the support of some of the weaker members of their constituency i.e. poor whites from particular regions.

⁴¹ This quote was used in the introduction, but it sums up so well how Obama might be seen to demonstrate that multi-ethnic future that it is used again here. Charles P. Henry, "Toward a Multiracial Democracy: The Jackson and Obama Contributions" in Charles P. Henry, Robert L. Allen and Robert Chrisman (eds.) *The Obama Phenomenon: Toward a Multiracial Democracy* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 28

For Judis the arithmetic remains complex and elections remain “open”.⁴² Such is the concern about these demographic trends that even this relatively short-term qualification⁴³ to the demographic effects has been treated as of great importance. Such is the worry ascribed to the demographic trends that the partial recanting by one of the authors John Judis, led to what Chait calls “giddy responses” from a number of important conservative commentators and an “outpouring of conservative celebration”.⁴⁴ Given the general lack of attempts by the mainstream on the right to do anything about increasing numbers of immigrants there is quite a fatalistic response to these demographic trends.

Though there is scope to mobilise popular opposition to the current trends in immigration, however there is only a few on the right who are currently arguing something must be done. Perhaps surprisingly there is little made of this by mainstream Republicans given the voting implications. However this suggests the elite consensus on this issue and how, despite what whiteness studies authors argue, there is no real cultural weight behind whiteness today.

In a pale echo to nativism there is a minor current in US politics that is attempting to tackle immigration. Ann Coulter’s 2015 book, *¡Adios, America!: The Left’s Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole*,⁴⁵ has become influential in identifying immigration as a vital question for the Republicans. Coulter seems to be something of a one woman campaign on the topic, to the extent that she has been able to insert

⁴² Jonathan Chait, “Is the Emerging Democratic Majority Already Dead?”, New York magazine, 16 February 2014, accessed 1 August 2016, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/02/the-emerging-democratic-majority-dead.html>

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ann Coulter. *¡Adios, America!: The Left’s Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole*. (Regnery: New York, 2015), ebook,

herself onto the 2016 campaign through her polemics. As of 2015 Donald Trump had adopted, if sometimes quite crudely, many of the arguments in the book.⁴⁶

For Coulter, immigration is not an important question. It is the only question. If the right loses on immigration everything is lost because the America they love will be destroyed. Coulter's argument is that large scale immigration has been adopted by Democrats because of their inability to get support from the existing, largely white, American public. For Coulter this meant that unable to change the minds of the voters, Democrats decided to changes the voters:

“Liberals had tried convincing Americans to vote for them, but that kept ending badly. Except for Lyndon Johnson's aberrational 1964 landslide, Democrats have not been able to get a majority of white people to vote for them in any presidential election since 1948. Their only hope was to bring in new voters. Okay, fine. You won't vote for us, America? We tried this the easy way, but you give us no choice. We're going to overwhelm you with new voters from the Third World.”⁴⁷

Further, millions of illegal immigrants from Mexico are awaiting an amnesty to swell the numbers.

For Coulter, Teddy Kennedy, the Bête Noire of the right, was misleading the country if not himself when brought forward the 1965 bill that revived large-scale immigration.

⁴⁶ Donald Trump made use of Coulter's book. Trump called the book a “great read” and according to Coulter he read it cover to cover. Carlos Lozada, “Did Ann Coulter's new book help inspire Trump's Mexican ‘rapists’ comments?”, Washington Post, 3 August 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/book-party/wp/2015/08/03/did-ann-coulter-s-new-book-inspire-donald-trumps-mexican-rapists-comment/> Peter Beinart, “The Republican Party's White Strategy”, The Atlantic, July/August 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/07/the-white-strategy/485612/>

⁴⁷ Ann Coulter. *¡Adios, America!: The Left's Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole*. (Regnery: New York, 2015), ebook, chapter 1

Kennedy stated the new law “will not inundate America with immigrants from any one country or area, or the most populated and deprived nations of Africa and Asia.” America, he said, would continue to have the same “ethnic mix,” and “the ethnic pattern of immigration under the proposed measure is not expected to change as sharply as the critics seem to think.” One key change that Kennedy did not anticipate, however, is that relatives of immigrants would be allowed into the country. It was this change that brought the numbers seen today and that is changing the racial composition of the electorate.

Coulter makes the case that this change is now clearly a conscious one. She cites the Democratic consultant Patrick Reddy writing in 1998 who argues that immigration is the lasting contribution of the Kennedys to the Democrats. Reddy states that this bill “has resulted in a wave of immigration from the Third World that should shift the nation in a more liberal direction within a generation. It will go down as the Kennedy family’s greatest gift to the Democratic Party.”⁴⁸ For Coulter this is one of the rare cases where the Democrats are honest in stating what they are trying to achieve through mass immigration. She notes that Democrats pick up votes from such immigrants at a rate of at least 2 to 1 and as much as 4 to 1.⁴⁹ Coulter reckons that future offspring of immigrants – a few generations down the line – might become Republicans but by that stage changes in the politics and the character of the country will be irreversible. She argues that with large scale immigration from third-world countries there that the backward prejudices of “peasant societies” will replace the liberal values the US exhibits today.

⁴⁸ Patrick Reddy, “Immigration: The Real Kennedy Legacy”, *The Public Perspective*, October/November 1998, 18-19 [cited in chapter 2]

⁴⁹ Ann Coulter. *¡Adios, America!: The Left’s Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole*. (Regnery: New York, 2015), ebook, chapter 1

For Coulter, the Democrats in bringing in mass migration of unskilled labour, and allowing similar illegal immigration to go unchecked, that competes with the sections of the working class which have had it most hard in recent decades have turned their back on the working class: “Back when Democrats still claimed to represent working Americans, they opposed illegal immigration. Since being taken over by the Far Left, all that matters to them is changing the electorate to one that doesn’t mind liberal insanity.”⁵⁰ Further she connects the difficulties that young black men have in getting jobs to having to compete with this influx. She notes the children of the elites in the work they do face no such competition from unskilled migrants.

Overall there is nothing that might be called a nativist movement today in comparison with that of the past. From 1890 to 1924, there was continual political campaigning to restrict immigration. There was the sense that the new white immigrants were alien to the existing “native” population. Against such campaigners were the interests of business. Business wanted to continue importing cheap labour to enable continued economic expansion. Eventually the political dislocation was such that business was forced to retreat. While in that period the Republicans were the party of big business, today business funds both political parties. The opposition to immigration might be widespread but the population finds this difficult to get representation in the form of political leadership. It seems that Republicans seem resigned to bringing in the immigration that seems likely to undermine their electoral position such it seems is their concern about stoking a racial backlash or in being seen to be racist.

⁵⁰ Ann Coulter. *¡Adios, America!: The Left’s Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole*. (Regnery: New York, 2015), ebook, chapter 1

The role of the elite can also be seen in attempting to get support for immigration done through journalism. Coulter uses case studies from journalism to make the case that there is the playing out of a culture war. Coulter uses numerous examples of the reporting of rapes and physical attacks by immigrants and illegal immigrants where the reporters goes to lengths to not report the national origins or background of those alleged or convicted of rape or serious assaults. The journalists end up reporting “police hunting man, 34” etc. These journalists have taken it upon themselves to avoid giving the public information because they are worried about what the public will do with it. What Coulter seems to identify here is the lack of trust in display in way in which the elite have no sense of the need to discuss immigration, to raise the issues with the public and get support for the change that is happening. While US politics has seen the development of a post-racial outlook where it comes to the racial politics of the twentieth century, it might be expected that immigration will re-raise race in the next few years despite, or perhaps because, of the lack of substantial discussion on immigration.

Whiteness as a political question

One reason given that Coulter should not be so worried about whites becoming a minority is that it is possible for “brown” immigrants to become white. We have seen how for a number of groups starting with the Irish in the 1950s there has been a process of racial inclusion that made these ethnic groups part of the expanding and ultimately singular white race. Whiteness studies authors such as Olson and Roediger make this case for current immigrants. They argue that a group becomes part of the white race is a political question not a biological/demographic one. Roediger argues that the mixed raced Americans of future years may or may not become white and that decision cannot be simply predicted: “No-one knows what the

racial identification of Latino mixed-race people, the largest single category projected, will be in 2100. It is entirely possible to imagine a white majority continuing for centuries based on choices that mixed-race people make”.⁵¹ Olson is more definitive arguing that immigrants assimilate by showing they are more successful than blacks and ultimately that they share the sense of superiority to and hostility to blacks. He argues that “A bipolar order will persist as the white category expands to include Asians and Latinos (even if they prefer not to be referred to as “white” specifically), while Blackness remains the touchstone against which full assimilation is measured.”⁵²

Another point must be considered here, however. The assimilation of white ethnics in the nineteenth and twentieth century took place with the native protestant whites. This group was at the centre of society, was understood to have positive attributes and had a sense of its superiority, of white superiority. Thus, it made sense for Catholic white ethnics from Southern and Eastern Europe to want to merge with this grouping and accrue the benefits of being part of the ruling group as part of a cross class alliance of being white. Whites today, however, are very different. Contemporary whites doubt themselves and mainstream white culture is broadly criticised and seen as backward. The positive attributes of whiteness are noticeable by their absence.

Rather than see a new nativist movement or basis for one, the suggestion here is that white elites will attempt to work with immigrant groups retaining racial identities in a multi-cultural framework – for example through the Republicans attempting to gain support from Latinos – rather than attempting an alliance with the white

⁵¹ Roediger, *How Race Survived...*, 220

⁵² Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 119

working/middle class. Notably this could happen alongside something of a racial division of labour that new immigrants take on.⁵³ The lack of concern about the “browning” of America might be taken as a sign that there is little support among elites for maintaining whiteness. The difference between the worries about “race suicide” for Protestant whites facing competition with Catholic white immigrants stated at the presidential level in the early part of the twentieth century⁵⁴ and the lack of concern today could not be more stark. The main concern among elites as shown in the Obama election is not in the number of non-white immigrants, but rather in the backward response to immigration by many whites. The lack of concern for whiteness should give some indication of how little weight such racial attachments have for mainstream political leaders today. Obama’s campaign has been continuously linked to the USA becoming a country where the majority are from minorities – in that sense we might also consider that, as one commentator noted, post-racial is at the same time post-white.⁵⁵

⁵³ Should that expansion into whiteness not take place, Olson suggests another option. Especially given the numerical dominance of Latin immigrants, these immigrants may import Latin forms of racial organisation: “A possible outcome of this combination of immigrant assimilation and Black superfluity could be the Latin Americanization of the racial order...a system of numerous racial gradations between white and Black that allow for social mobility among them, since wealth can “whiten” an otherwise dark person.” Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 121

⁵⁴ Theodor Roosevelt in 1907 cited in Thomas C. Leonard, “Retrospectives: Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (2005): 209

⁵⁵ Hua Hsu, “The End of White America?”, *The Atlantic*, January/February 2009, accessed 29 March 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/01/the-end-of-white-america/7208/>

Conclusion

The main question the thesis aimed to answer is what function race played in the election. As secondary questions we wanted to account for the enthusiasm shown in the election, to understand why race was discussed in the election without reference to equality, and to understand how race had changed in the twentieth century.

Accounting for the enthusiasm that came with the Obama campaign

This thesis has developed the argument that only the issue of race can adequately explain the energy unleashed in the 2008 election. This is despite the downplaying of race by Obama and by the various campaigns.⁵⁶ The thesis examined possible alternative explanations – of the power of “hope”/“change” and of the importance of online campaigning – and found them secondary or connected to race in their importance. The political enthusiasm shown in the 2008 election must be seen as stemming from race. Renouncing race raised the expectations and excitement of millions, filled campaign coffers with online donations, got out the volunteers, the caucus goers and voters. The intensity of Obama’s support surprised commentators and candidates alike. The Obama election marked an upwelling of enthusiasm, excitement and creativity⁵⁷, something all too rare in contemporary political life. It seems clear that many millions were unhappy with the situation on race as was and desired change.

We made the case that without historical or political explanation, the default explanation for race has been in the attitudes and psychology of whites. Given our

⁵⁶ According to a working paper by academic Daniel Gillion, Obama continued the pattern in office. In his first two years Obama mentioned race “less than any Democratic president since 1961” cited in Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Fear of a Black President”, *The Atlantic*, September 2012, accessed 10 April 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/09/fear-of-a-black-president/309064/>

⁵⁷ Shown, for example, in the online content ,supporters created..

argument has been that there has been a falling away of racial politics yet whites have been identified with racism, many whites undoubtedly considered the 2008 election as an opportunity to make the case that they were not racist. Part of the reason for excitement, emotion and activity surrounding the Obama campaign should be in understanding how many whites wanted to dissociate themselves from a racial stance and were attracted to the politics of “hope” expressed in the idea that a black man could make it to the top in America. This might even be taken more broadly as a “chance for national redemption”.⁵⁸ The limited way in which race was understood meant many whites wanted to set the record straight on their political views or cultural outlook as a counterweight to the way in which, as whites, they have been connected with racial politics.

The desire of many whites to distance themselves from the racial past was heightened through the connections Obama’s campaign made with history. Obama’s campaign played to the idea that history was at stake in the election and leant on historical narratives. An important aspect of Obama’s appeal was the connection made between his presidential bid and important events and personalities from US history. Obama announced his presidential bid where another tall, gangly lawyer from Chicago, Lincoln, started his political career – in Springfield, Illinois – with a speech that echoed Lincoln’s against slavery.⁵⁹ Obama used the powerful rhetorical forms and devices of Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. Connections were made with tropes that are part of every US child’s history class and these were picked up and developed journalistically in the media. As discussed previously, through the

⁵⁸ Peniel E. Joseph, *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama*, (New York: BasicCivitas, 2010), 213.

⁵⁹ Adam Nagourney and Jeff Zeleny, “Obama Formally Enters Presidential Race”, *New York Times*, 11 February 2007, accessed 10 April 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/11/us/politics/11obama.html>

idea of “hope”, Obama reworked freedom struggles of the American past as a vindication of the US ideal in a way that directly linked to his own person. This connection with history contrasted with the disillusionment with contemporary politics – expressed as the need for “change” – but did so in such a way that the cynical aspects of “change” were masked. In the election this might be seen as something of a conjuring trick. With few explicit promises being made the past was plundered to raise expectations.

One result of this was that those genuinely wanting to move beyond race had a common goal: the election of Obama. Thus the election, especially for Obama’s supporters, was something of a stand-in for all concerns related to race. The office of the president is meant to bring the nation together at least symbolically. *E pluribus unum* (“out of many, one”) is an unofficial motto of the USA, and this function is captured in many ways in the idea behind the office of the presidency. This in the form of the election of a black president, however, became a recipe for a passive form of engagement – the role of the body politic was to provide change simply in the form of a president with a different shade of skin. Putting Obama in office became in many ways the endpoint of the change and hope discussed in the campaign. The idea of attempting to do something about the often constrained life-chances on display among the black population seemed off the table. There was a profoundly limited sense of ambition available. Doing something about race had been reduced to a change in the racial background of the president. A political approach might have had it that there were ways of approaching the difficulties that blacks and many whites had together. There was no sense of attempting to create political solidarity or suggestions of campaigns or measures to overcome problems in employment, in housing, in education, or in the strained relations with law enforcement, for example.

Obama's emphasis on hope gave hope to all Americans because of the narrative of a black man rising above these depressing aspects of black life to become the most powerful man in the world. Perhaps the spontaneous upsurge might even have been taken somewhere after the Obama victory. Certainly there was a case to be made that there was a mismatch between what was on offer, the historical symbol of a black president, and the seeming desire of seeing an end to racial divisions and discrimination. But there was no political vehicle to harness such desires or programme to direct it. Subsequently, support for the Democrat candidate has ebbed. The 2012 election saw at best a pale shadow of the enthusiasm shown in 2008. With only a few years having passed, the description of Obama's support as "Obama-mania" began to suggest that something akin to collective insanity had taken hold, and subsequently some have become embarrassed at their enthusiasm. This has led to some disillusionment and a questioning of the collective madness that seemed to grip the electorate. For example the historian Andrew Bacevich noted that:

In retrospect, it's embarrassing to recall the "Yes, We Can!" jive that marked Obama's ascent to the presidency. Of course, the media are partly to blame... But ultimately, it's the American people who are at fault. We are the ones who indulge the fantasy that installing the right person in the White House will "fix" things. It won't. There are some things—a lot of things really—that just can't be fixed.⁶⁰

As we noted in the introduction, the enthusiasm for Obama on race was not because of attempts to overcome the racial divide. The racial divide was barely acknowledged and in policy Obama made no attempt at addressing racial divisions. Rather where Obama received support on the basis of race this should be seen in terms of identity.

⁶⁰ New York Magazine, "53 Historians...".

Obama's attraction when it comes to overcoming racial divisions is singularly because of the change in representation based on racial identity. This was connected with the personal sense of many that they wished to distance themselves from racial politics; that they had moved past race themselves.

A historical-political view of race in twentieth century America

We have made the case in several places in this thesis that an understanding of race cannot be derived from the consciousness of the electorate or of whites and that we needed to establish a historical-political analysis of race. The foundation upon which the Obama phenomenon and victory was built was a "turnaround" on race. The racial politics that were a powerful force for much of the twentieth century have increasingly become less important. To understand the Obama election we needed to try to explain why this was the case. The thesis wanted to try to explain why race had been so entrenched for most of the twentieth century and why subsequently the power behind that racial movement dissipated.

It was felt that without the thesis being able to present a sustained narrative that brought out the importance of race for US politics that the 2008 election could not itself be understood. Subsequently a major part of this thesis became an attempt to bring race into history – no matter how much race was perhaps misunderstood, or at least considered as a matter of identity, disconnected from matters of equality, in the election itself. The thesis looked to produce a consistent historical narrative that would be able to establish race's part in historical development in such a way that did not rest on psychological explanations or on the legacy of past racial formations in the South such as slavery or Jim Crow.

Initially, in seeking to bring race into history, the research looked at the physical divisions between blacks and whites that had been described in the early 1990s as American Apartheid.⁶¹ The patterns of post-war suburbanisation where whites from various national and ethnic backgrounds decamped from the cities to locales from which blacks were excluded underpinned the Apartheid discussed in the 1990s and clearly illuminates the racial divide. This focus has the merit of looking at the USA on a national basis rather than being limited to racial patterns in the South. Indeed, the narrative of Southern Civil Rights success against Jim Crow has been stressed to such an extent that the mainstream racial divisions outside the South came to be obscured over time. The incredible levels of physical separation outside Southern states had been downplayed despite the enormous numbers involved and despite the involvement of the federal state in incentivising and sometimes directly establishing the coming together of whites and the related separation from blacks.

What became clear when attempting to use this mass internal migration on a racial basis to draw out how race worked was that it had, in key ways, still to be explained. There was a racial outlook that fed into federal policy supporting all-white suburbanisation, with broad support among whites. However, what remained unclear was the reason for the racial prejudice on display. The racial outlook shown by policymakers and property developers was supplemented by a racial outlook in the population more generally. This was to the extent that there was little in the way of a debate or questioning of these divisions at the time. All-white suburbs, which had begun from the early twentieth century, became a political issue only into the 1960s. There was a need to explain the racial viewpoints behind these initiatives and the

⁶¹ Douglas S. Massey, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

level of support they had. Otherwise, the only explanation on offer was that whites were racist. And, this does not, as we have argued, in historical terms amount to an explanation.

In working back through history it increasingly became clear that starting in the late nineteenth century there were a number of political currents and campaigns that taken together developed what might be called a period of reaction. The politics of race can be seen as growing out of the conflicts of the late-nineteenth century – and ultimately became a means to deal with these conflicts. Problems of class and of nationality were to be negotiated in large part through means of racial identification as white and this racial ordering seen through via the physical distancing of whites from blacks most definitively in the form of suburban separation. The racial divisions between blacks and whites as part of the racial associations of a unitary whiteness became the major political project (and the major material project) of the USA in the twentieth century. To draw this out, the thesis worked through a range of superb historical works that looked at class politics, nativism, immigration, ethnic divisions and whiteness. The way in which class divisions – and the related questions of nationality and religion – came to be dealt with through whiteness was uniquely American. Here, I would argue, is in many ways the reason for US exceptionalism – the peculiar way in which questions of class and nation were negotiated such that class in particular did not form the basis for a clear political divide in the USA even in the era of mass industrial production.⁶² The divisions of class, nation, culture and

⁶² Foner, writing on the question of the lack of socialism in the USA, critiques what is perhaps the main explanation in the racial and ethnic divisions in the USA as being too general. He sets the task of “investigating the specific circumstances under which racial and ethnic divisions inhibit class solidarity”. Here we have attempted an outline of a historically specific treatment of how key elements of this worked in the political sphere, in particular making the case that malleable ethnic divisions among whites are subsumed in a white racial identity. Eric Foner, “Why is there no Socialism in the United States?”, *History Workshop*, (Oxford: Ruskin College, 1984): 67.

religion were ultimately dealt with using race and post-war US economic growth combined with the continental size of the country which allowed spaces and resources for the incorporation of white ethnics into an undifferentiated whiteness and the literal distancing of whites from the black population. Here we could bring out the historically specific nature of race as it came together in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century consolidated in the material form it took through the creation of whites only suburbs which was at the same time the consolidation of new political structures purposefully set against the old urban cores.

At this point we can note that our historical-political explanation of race fulfilled the five criteria that we set out in the introduction. First, the strength of feeling over an extended period of time can be explained by the pressures on white ethnics to fit into the racial order by distancing themselves from blacks and by the sizeable material benefits to be gained from inclusion in the white suburban spaces. Second, the national racial separation of whites from blacks explains how race became important nationally and not just in the South. Third, the 1924 immigration law that linked whiteness to national belonging explained how whiteness became connected with being American. Fourth, our historical account showed how race acted through racial separation as a means to consolidate a common whiteness in suburban expansion where mortgages were backed by federal guarantee. Fifth, the thesis could account for the lessening of race with the culmination of the racial project of a combined whiteness from the 1970s.

How racial factors and racial thinking changed during the C20th?

With race in its twentieth century form – understood as the project of bringing whites together to overcome political divisions – the thesis was able to explain why the

momentum behind the project flags. What becomes apparent is that the impetus behind race figuring as the creation of a combined, unitary whiteness runs its course. White ethnic immigrants eventually become as politically and socially white as those Northern European Protestant whites that previously made up the base of the nativist movement. Arriving at Ellis Island rather than at Plymouth Rock largely stopped being a functional difference or having political consequences. This combined whiteness was described by Jacobson as a “consanguine” whiteness – in other words whites become a unitary race, a family as if by blood, with previous group racial differentiations among whites forgotten.⁶³ Increasingly the motivations that were behind this outlook were weakened as the concerns upon which it was built no longer applied. The insecurities of a place in the racial order and the desire to mark a distance from blacks were increasingly less important. New generations brought up in the suburbs no longer felt the pressures that their parents and grandparents had felt as they left urban spaces marked out by racial conflict.

We connected the importance race has had in the modern period in the USA with a particular political project, that of the transformation of the various white groupings to being undifferentiated white Americans. With the completion of this project and the removal of the concerns of being white, Chapter 7 made the case that by the 1970s race in this sense had begun to lose its intensity. Without organisational forms to carry forward a collective memory of the initial concerns around race, generational change has meant that increasingly the insecurities of a position in the racial and ethnic order that so animated racial politics had greatly diminished. This point was demonstrated in the removal of the absolute barrier to blacks relocating to suburban

⁶³ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 354.

areas which previously were no-go zones that started in the 1970s and the subsequent reduction in what demographers call the “dissimilarity index”. Despite the divisions between blacks and whites, many blacks were now able to move into formerly all-white locales, economics permitting.

We made the case, however, that this lessening of the importance of race was disguised and subsequently rendered less important, identifying two key factors. The first was the way in which the major parties continued to deprioritise black concerns in an attempt to maintain what they saw as racially influenced white support. The problems blacks had, which were often expressed as distinct because of the social, economic, and spatial distance from the middle-class white experience, had difficulty even being acknowledged by the major parties. What Frymer calls the “capturing” of the black vote meant that black electoral influence could often be ignored along with black concerns – as black voters had nowhere else to go. Additionally there was the sense that the acknowledgement of the needs of blacks would bring with it problems for white support. Perhaps the extent to which that this is true is questionable, but a cautious political assessment from party leaders would have it that there is no reason to put white support at risk. Without significant attempts at political solidarity the pressure to alter this orientation has been lacking. In effect this orientation propped up and extended the politics of race.

The second factor that acted to disguise these changes was the way in which a politics of exclusion based around suburban interests tended to act as a replacement for the politics of race. Despite a falling away of the importance of racial distancing as a concern for many whites, nonetheless there remained a local politics, the orientation of which was to create a distance from others and their problems which was especially connected with suburban locales. Subsequently there is politics of

space that, even without specifically racial concerns, works against the interests of the poor and of the blacks overrepresented in their ranks.

This second factor, we suggest, of a polity organised around the needs of small enclaves of relatively narrow self-interest, is in part an unintended consequence of US racial politics and the particular form that this politics took through spatial separation. Without necessarily primarily having a racial component in this later period, there is nonetheless a divided politics at work. Nor, perhaps, could or should this politics be described as a coherent class politics given its local character. Indeed the relative insularity of the concerns of suburban enclaves perhaps points towards difficulties in the formation or articulation of class interests. The enormous number of small well-organised, self-governing locales based around a striving to control local taxation and ensure it goes only to their own requirements tends to work against both state and federal policies and attempts to muster resources to resolve wider problems. We identified in Chapter 7, that, in this context, the complex politics of a differentiated suburbia unevenly affected by economic problems can be seen as a better explanation of political problems and orientations than the much more generalised politics of race of the post war period.

It should be noted that our analysis runs counter to and brings into question the dominant narrative of a racial backlash by whites starting in the late 1960s. The default view has it that the gains made by the Civil Rights movement are met with white resentment and that subsequently Republicans made electoral gains through splitting off members of what had been the New Deal coalition using often coded racial appeals both in the South and then more widely – described by the idea of the “Southernisation” of US politics. However, as we argued in Chapter 7, racial division was not a product of Republican politicking or new to the period. Rather the division

between blacks and whites was already established and this had happened in great part through the New Deal. The difficulties that the liberal programme had in inspiring supporters or solving contemporary problems – which Nixon tried to deal with at an early stage through the idea of the “silent majority” – was what was at issue rather than the racial views of whites.

Why race was understood through identity and disconnected from equality

From a historical perspective, and as discussed in Chapter 6, race as used in the 2008 election was understood through matters of identity and as disconnected from equality: during the election, matters of representation, recognition and symbolism predominated. Matters of equality, integration and discrimination, that have previously been considered key when it came to race, were seldom raised. This focus on identity was not new. However, the way that discussion of race in 2008 was dominated by matters of the representation and symbolism that might come with a black president was striking and notable. Especially given the opportunities presented by what were considered historic changes, the fixation on matters of recognition suggests that there was a limited political imagination at play during the election and that campaigning across racial lines for solidarity based on common interests was not considered feasible or perhaps not even considered.

Chapter 8 attempted to establish how and why politics connected with identity had become so powerful. The Civil Rights movement came to a stuttering halt faced with determined opposition against the racial divisions in the North in the late 1960s. Programmes such the Johnson’s War on Poverty, likewise, faced seemingly insurmountable problems. The subsequent political approach was not aimed at

overcoming racial division or attempting to integrate blacks into the US mainstream. Rather, the focus shifted to acknowledging racial divisions as a means to managing them. Affirmative action started with Nixon in an attempt to diffuse problems through working with existing racial identities. The consequence was that civil rights questions and activism have tended to be swallowed up in a defence of the idea that the state must manipulate outcomes based on race on the basis of redressing past injustices. This colour conscious approach undercut previous orientations towards equality with energies directed towards gaining federal support and funds rather than attempting to raise support from fellow citizens.

The thesis discussed how identity politics became the predominant way in which race was seen and dealt with. This was done not just with affirmative action but, for example, with therapeutic approaches that attempted to regulate the relationships and even the language of interactions between those of different races. It explored how, for example, with Bill Clinton the politics of identity became a powerful way of gathering black support and of diffusing racial conflict. Increasingly over time the goal of equality was abandoned. The thesis looked at the latest approach, racial realism, which further distanced racially conscious forms of management from any link with equality.

In a supplement to the politics of identity we discussed how the conceptions of white identity, of whiteness, have been used to dismiss the idea of equality. In Chapter 9, we discussed how with the idea of whiteness being taken up as an explanation in itself for the maintenance of racial domination, that formal equality has been discounted dismissed as disguising the effects of white privilege. However, that despite the concerns of whiteness studies authors that whiteness is still a powerful force that oppresses, rather today whiteness is under attack as backward, racist etc.

Here whiteness studies style approaches end up being on one side of the culture wars.

The role of race in the 2008 election

The role of race in the 2008 election can be understood as an attempt to distance the polity from the racial organisation that was so powerful for most of the twentieth century. Race was important for bringing together white Americans of different classes in the shared success of the American Century. The sense of racial togetherness lessened the importance of class antagonism and, initially, the antagonisms of religion and national background. However by the 1970s these previous antagonisms, between whites at least, had greatly diminished. The conflict of identity between white ethnic background and white American no longer existed, the drive and/or pressure to fit into white America was no longer at issue. With the passing of the drive to fit into a white society, which was at the same time a distancing from blacks, and which at the same time was the mechanism to bring the different white ethnic groups together, racism became an anachronism and increasingly morally abhorrent. The racism of US society was clearly unproductive, alienated foreigners and immigrants, caused conflict, and was increasingly alien to new generations. The thesis charted the rise of race in this twentieth century form and then its dissolution. We attempted to show the backlash against Cold War whiteness and the hostility to the racism with which it was connected.

In the wake of the completed project of white American unity, racism became a problem. From the Democrat's side they seemed constantly under criticism for policies whenever it seemed they might help blacks. It seemed race was a tool used by Republicans that linked social reform to support for the poor, made undeserving

by racial background. Even with polls showing support for Obama, the Democrats held their breath hoping that election returns did not show the “Bradley Effect” i.e. whites had hidden their prejudices against Obama in opinion polling and would vote McCain in the privacy of the polling booth.⁶⁴ Because the understanding was that the Republicans had relied on coded racial appeals to white bases of support in recent years the relief was that, in the words of Democrat supporters’ chants, “race doesn’t matter!”. This thesis has made the case, however, that such fears were overblown. The understanding that racism lurked in the background, in the consciousness of many whites, did not describe reality. This thesis made the case that the strength of identification with race in its twentieth century form has long been in decline. The Republicans needed to accommodate an electorate that was increasingly non-white and so being linked to racial views was a constant but growing problem. Further, race was connected with populist outpourings which have been constantly disruptive. Both parties were invested in the polity moving away from race in its twentieth century form and thus defusing its potential effects.

Consequently the primary way in which race figured immediately in the election was as an attempt to *avoid* making race into a political issue. Republicans saw no

⁶⁴ Rickey Hill, “The Race Problematic, The Narrative of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Election of Barack Obama” in Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke (eds.), *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America’s New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 144; This was also discussed as a potential issue in the New Hampshire primary, see Carly Fraser, “Race, Postblack Politics, and the Candidacy of Barack Obama” in Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke (eds.), *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America’s New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 144, 170. One study purported to show the Bradley effect at work in the Democrat primaries in states with low black populations but also a “Reverse” Bradley effect in states with large black populations. Anthony G. Greenwald and Bethany Albertson, “Tracking the Race Factor”, 14 March 2008, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/05/tracking-the-race-factor/>. Another academic notes that the Bradley effect has itself been brought into question and suggests that what is important is not the subconscious bias but that once called to attention any bias is not defended Richard A. Epstein, “The Good News on Race Relations”, *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 157, No. 210, 2009, 218

mileage in playing to racial sentiments and were concerned they might appear racist. Democrats did not want to alienate whites by any hint that resources might be directed towards the urban poor. This was combined with a general sensitivity to discussing race that has been a feature of politics in recent years. Pronouncements by both Republicans and Democrats are scanned for any hint of prejudice or controversy on the issue. Consequently both parties saw little gain to be had and so had little to say on race. Further, Obama distanced himself from the idea that race was or should be a factor in policy.

To remove race from politics might be considered difficult, however, given the massive disparities in resources and life chances that remain for blacks and whites. One way to removing the source of the difficulty could be done by bringing some measure of development to the black urban ghettos, but this was not seen as plausible. Rather race could be removed as a political problem by allowing it to continue at the level of identity, to recognise and allow for cultural expressions but to remove the link between race and equality. It was this link with equality that had energised those either wanting to overcome race and those wanting to see blacks oppressed.

The thesis charted how this worked from Nixon on: how this shift from matters of equality to the recognition of identity is how race had long been managed in the USA. As we attempted to show when discussing identity politics it allowed for race to be recognised in law and racial group membership allowed to be used as a passport to resources, employment etc. by some middle class blacks. Thus matters of equality became secondary as racial difference was acknowledged and accepted.

The post-racial strategy of the election was to further remove race from politics. It did that partly, as we discussed, through deconstructing race. As we discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, race through the mechanism of “hope” was used in making race part of the many narratives of lives that might be expressed in the many American Dreams. Here as race became part of everyday lives it was also removed from politics. This was also a distancing from whiteness and the national link between being American and whiteness.

The other way that the polity was distanced from race was through the election itself. The mass campaigning by whites to elect Obama signalled both their own personal dislike of race and also the way in which the polity as a whole wanted to move beyond race. However, perhaps the greatest way that the USA signalled being post-racial was in the form of Obama’s election. Thus representation and identity played their role again to manage race. As we discussed in Chapter 1, Obama was in many ways the endpoint of the campaigning.

Race in its twentieth century guise did not directly impact the Obama election. There was no sense of an attempt at a revival of the idea of a “white” America. Rather what was at issue was whether whites could pass the test of having transcended their racist past by voting for Obama. In that regard race as it figured in 2008, as a cultural test of whites might be understood as part of the culture wars. Our analysis, however, points to the decline of race in the form it took for most of the twentieth century. The hostility towards blacks as part of marking out a position within the consolidation of white mainstream America was largely marginal as of the 2008 election. Undoubtedly there were some politicians attempting to whip up animosity towards Obama, but these amounted to sideshows. In one way the parties had long

artificially kept race going by, as we discussed in Chapter 7, deciding to marginalise the interests of blacks.

Indeed as part of the culture wars, expressed through the efforts of those associated with whiteness studies, and as we discussed in Chapter 9, attacks on white culture have continued. Indeed given the difficulties of changing one's culture these often amount to continued attacks on whites. Partly it seems that to maintain many racialised cultures means opposition to white culture seen as causing oppression.

We have discussed the way that in 2008 it becomes clear that race has been divorced from questions of equality. The absence of any significant politics of equality, the lack of any movement that have attempted solidarity across the race line means that the enormous racial divisions have not been brought into question. To overcome such divisions requires political will and support to garner resources. It is not just that the racial divide has not been attacked but also that the idea of equality and attempts to bridge the divide based on attacking inequality have been dismissed. Rather than raise the problem of the racial divide, through the fixing of racial identities in identity politics, of which whiteness should be counted an aspect, there is a shoring up of the racial divisions.

Public proclamations of the idea of that the USA was post-racial have not continued through Obama's time in office. They have been replaced by descriptions of the tensions that came with racial shootings Black Lives Matter protests.⁶⁵ Indeed public opinion has come to see worsening race relations. Drawing too much attention to being post-racial raises a number of uncomfortable questions about the divisions

⁶⁵ This is shown by the quoting of editorials that stated the USA was post-racial were limited to a small number of pieces that came in the week following the Obama victory. REF??

between blacks and whites. However, the idea that came with the USA being post-racial still remains. Race is not the issue it was, dividing the US polity.

Whereas blackness still exists and provides a cultural touchstone with which people identify themselves, whiteness, in its older “mainstream” normal sense, does not. The United States is not so much post-racial but is seeing the break-up of the white identity established in the interwar years. Obama’s election took place in a context when whiteness – another form of American-ness – is no longer regnant, no longer encapsulates values that others look up to. In the 1960s most Americans saw themselves as success stories – ordinary people from diverse backgrounds who superseded their class/ethnic backgrounds to become successful, patriotic, law-abiding, independent, morally-improving, entrepreneurial embodiments of the American Dream. Blacks served as the repository of all was negative and un-American – inner-city, violent, hopelessly poor, suffering family breakdown, welfare-dependent, criminal etc.

But in the late 1960s and 1970s this white mainstream was impugned as institutionally racist, as irrationally anti-communist, war-mongering and culturally vapid. Expressed in affirmative action, the moral improvement expected in Myrdal appeared to have stopped, Americans were seen as hopelessly racist, their values corrupt. Cast adrift by political leaders some whites have attempted to cast themselves as victims of this change – encouraged by the template set out by Nixon’s silent majority. African Americans continue to exist in a negative relationship to white Americans overall, embodying the worst of America. Although what previously have been seen as negative cultural traits – shallow materialism and violence of the inner cities – have, in a twist, become partly celebrated quite widely today.

Obama as President: The limits of representation

With Obama in power it could be argued that there has been sensitivity towards matters of race that would not otherwise have been the case. The treatment of racial incidents was attempted through mediation and linked to identity. Obama's connection was that blacks might be discriminated against because they looked "like me". Here, Obama attempted to setup an encounter group for the nation. Obama might be described as the Therapist in Chief. While there has been further reaction to police violence because of its sometimes overt racial nature, this response is limited to the issue of police violence and seems unable to connect with whites or else look at broader issues. While it seems possible for the style of US policing to be modified, it seems unclear that this approach would appear that there is little in the way of a political approach to tackle other divisions. Matters of economics, housing, employment, education, health and black disadvantage have not been able to feature in the politics on offer today. The politics of representation can say that blacks should be treated as human beings, but the ability to move beyond that and look at equality more broadly is not present.

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