

MAGIC MULATTO: BARACK OBAMA'S BIRACIAL BODY AND RACE
PERFORMANCE

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways President Barack Obama navigates his biracial identity through race performances in his discourse. Born to a Kenyan father and European mother, Obama was in a unique position to speak on racial issues, especially since occurrences of racial violence began to debunk the myth of a post-racial America after his election. After Dylan Roof shot and killed nine African Americans in a church in Charleston, South Carolina and Micah Johnson, provoked by police killing African Americans in multiple incidents, shot and killed five police officers, Obama was presented with a rhetorical situation. Although he mostly avoided discussing race in his speeches, these racially charged incidents indicated an urgent need for him to address race and its impact in his eulogies for the dead. I analyze his eulogies for Clementa Pinckney, who was a reverend for the Methodist Episcopal church in South Carolina and the five police officers to argue that Obama embodies racial ideologies to connect with audiences and their experiences to provoke new meanings of identity. His experiences as a biracial man assist him in redefining inclusive notions of citizenship and provoking audiences to a more intense sense of W.E.B. DuBois' double consciousness, hyperconsciousness in order to truly overpower the color line.

CHAPTER 1

BIRACIAL IDENTITY NEGOTIATION: A PERFORMATIVE APPROACH

Background

On November 4, 2008, America made the first move toward a seemingly post-racial society when President Barack Obama, the first bi-racial president, was elected. In reality, his national rise proved America to be a society blinded by color instead of a color-blind nation. During Obama's first presidential race against Senator John McCain in 2008, there were more public debates on the color of his skin and ethnicity than his political views. For instance, Senator Harry Reid predicted Obama was capable of becoming the first black president because he was "light-skinned" and had "no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one" (Zeleny, 2010). Senator Reid later apologized for his remarks and shamefully, was not the only politician to make such discriminatory statements. Obama's own Vice President to be, Joe Biden, once stated that Obama was "the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy" (Zeleny, 2010). Prejudices in these statements stem from America's divisive history. Further arguments from journalists and citizens' over Obama's ethnic background, citizenship, and physical appearance during his candidacy prove W.E.B. DuBois' expectation that the color line between black and white would govern the world (DuBois, 1903).

Prejudice policing and systemic racism provide more evidence of DuBois' prediction. As African American deaths at the hands of police officers continue to rise, divisions among American citizens prevail. The #BlackLivesMatter movement formed after George Zimmerman was acquitted after he shot and killed 17-year-old African

American, Trayvon Martin in 2013 (Bailey & Leonard, 2015). The movement urges conversation about careless treatment of black lives in America and exposes the inner workings of white supremacy. Many Americans, especially African Americans, are wondering how minorities continue to struggle for equality, even as the first “black” president sits in the oval office.

Some journalists and blog writers like Amity Payne from NBC News have called attention to biracial participation in the fight for black lives (Payne, 2015). For biracial individuals of black and white descent in America, the color line is internalized and becomes a part of our identity. As a product of an interracial marriage between an African-American man and a Caucasian woman, there is a constant civil war in the most personal part of my being. My identity is directly linked to the historical struggle between blacks and whites in America. Some would argue I have the best of both worlds but when those worlds have deep disparities with one another, embodying both becomes quite challenging, especially when neither world is ready to face or learn from my existence. To further explore the biracial experience, I examine how President Obama negotiated his hybrid identity in public discourse as candidate and president within a community that has long been separated on the grounds of race.

Insight into biracial identity negotiation is important to the story of social justice and equality in America. The fact that biracial individuals exist is a testament to the natural inclusivity of humanity and proof that race is a divisive social construction (Goodale & Engels, 2010). President Obama’s election was full of irony - an illusion of progress in a nation known for violent actions toward non-white groups, starting with the war on Native Americans and enslavement of Africans. Nonetheless, race relation issues

continue to engross Americans and Obama's presidency seems to have brought them to the forefront once again. As Americans continue to live in racially segregated communities, experience social, political, and economic inequality, Obama stands in a unique position to represent and persuade unity among all Americans. Obama's performance of race reveals the intricacies of race as a social construction and its impact on multiracial identity.

President Obama's presidency parallels the timeline of biracial identity in America, from outside forces assuming an identity for him before his presidency to looking at him and daring him to choose an identity on a national stage during social movements. Throughout history, the "mulatto(a)'s" identity was chosen for him or her for legal purposes. During slavery, the white master ruled the identity of his mulatto children and could free them *if* he wanted to (Millward, 2010). During Jim Crow, the one-drop rule determined whether a mixed-race person was persecuted of a crime like sleeping with a white person (Orbe, Harrison, Kauffman, & Laurent, 2015). Later, mixed people were allowed to choose their identity in the U.S. Census, however, they had to identify with their minority race (Thompson, 2012). In 2000, the U.S. Census finally provided the option for people to choose more than one race. Even with this option, Obama checked "African American" on the 2010 census questionnaire (Roberts & Parker, 2010). Of course, there was controversy over his choice to do so and there are many potential explanations from claiming his spot in history as the first black president to simply identifying more with his African American identity on that day at that particular time. The latter may sound outrageous to some people; yet, mixed-race individuals would be able to attest to the chameleon-like nature of multiracialism.

President Obama's rhetoric is an example of the fluid (or spasmodic) nature of biracial identity negotiation and is an opportunity to understand how he identifies and performs his racial identity in certain situations. More importantly, it lends insight into societal beliefs about race in America. My study also expands on DuBois' double-consciousness theory because biracial individuals have a hypersensitivity to, or hyper-consciousness of their conflicting identities to the majority of the identities existent within their environments. Additionally, there is a desire for coherence between physical appearance and their internal sense of identity that becomes unattainable in a society where one's identity is deemed "half" or incomplete. The first section reviews the disciplinary literature relevant to my critique including mulatto identity throughout American history, treatment of the mixed-race body, interracial relationships and identity negotiation and finally, discussions about various aspects of Obama's identity. The second and third sections explain my critical approach, theoretical lenses and justification and last, I include a chapter outline of my study.

Literature Review

The object of my thesis is to examine how biracial individuals, in this case specifically President Obama, navigate their hybrid identity within a community that has long been separated by skin color, behavior, and culture. First, I will review the scholarly discussion of mixed-race identity. Some race principles and identity theories will inevitably be mentioned along with historical examinations of "the mulatto" trope. Second, I touch on explorations of identity negotiation within interracial couples and families and third, I discuss the communication field's treatment of Obama with particular focus on literature discussing his race. My concluding section discusses how

my thesis will contribute to existing literature in terms of relevance to and outside the communication field.

The “Tragic Mulatto”

The “tragic mulatto/a” is a stereotype of a mixed-race individual distraught with confusion because they are not considered black or white. Nonetheless, the mulatto/a is not born tragic but is born into a tragic society where white and black are like oil and water - two substances that “just don’t mix,” as quoted in a movie about an interracial couple called *Save the Last Dance*. Although mixed-race persons are evidence of the contrary, their mixed identity is often dismissed, disrespected, and scoffed. Zora Howard, a biracial poet, expresses the racism persons of black and white descent experience on a daily basis in a spoken word poem entitled *Biracial Hair*. Howard’s descriptions of her biracial hair - seemingly smooth, silky and cooperative on the outside like European hair yet, nappy, tangled and stubborn at the roots like that of African American hair – are satirical. Her hair’s conflicting personality is a metaphorical representation of the two identities in her biological make-up, the tension between those two identities, and the friction they cause between her and the outside world. Outside reactions to her hair are implied to mimic how society responds to her being. She refers to her “naps” as “slave naps” that “no man can handle.” She raises her voice to seemingly reenact moments where her peers touch her hair out of curiosity and marvel at its difference. She yells, “No way you are touching my hair! - Naps like back ten feet up or we can dance naps.” Her demands for the person touching her hair to “back up” is not a condescending gesture, but a cry of frustration compounded with a need for protection against another moment

where she is treated like some sort of zoo animal or foreign object that must be examined, explored and figured out.

Not only does Howard use her hair to explain tension in her relationships with peers but with family also. She talks about how her mother tries to style her hair into braids but the stubborn nature of her hair turns what is supposed to be a bonding mother-daughter moment into an unbearable unfamiliarity, which her mother eventually abandons altogether as she leaves her hair “left half undone.” Howard’s initial focus on hair and appearance - especially in times where she looks in the mirror convincing herself she looks “just like Alicia Keys,” a famous, multiracial R&B singer and songwriter - make her problems seem superficial or surface-level. A sudden turn in the poem, though, reveals that the root of the problem is deeper than her lighter complexioned skin and lies in her blood where the history of the mixed person’s genealogy is found. Her imitation of middle school kids who try to compare her to different types of cookies based on her skin color is a mere annoyance compared to the hurt she recounts when people dismiss her historical struggle with slavery. She exclaims that her “bi-racial roots are not blind” and begs for others to open their eyes to the stark reality of her mixedness: “I have bi-racial blood / I’m not talking about that – cute they met then fell in love blood / I’m talking about that slave raped six times by the master, birthing six mixed babies, later hung, blood” (Howard, 2006)!

As Howard’s poem suggests, the modern attitudes towards biracial people originated during slavery when “mulatto” children were strictly products of rape and symbols of oppressive power structures. Since legislation built a strong foundation for the white man’s throne, white men moved freely in society with almost no restraint,

especially in terms of property. Slave masters could beat, rape and kill their slaves if they saw fit. Some masters purchased slaves for sexual pleasure and it was no secret to their wives, who often suffered in silence because there was nothing else to do. Legally, sexually violating female slaves was supported. Reproduction ensured slavery would continue and the law did not discriminate against offspring of two slaves or a slave and her master. In fact, legal ramifications guaranteed that the offspring of a white man and a slave woman were considered slaves regardless of their white genes. The “mother rule” stated that if the mother of a child was a slave, then the child was a slave too (Millward, 2010). Howard’s implications of her relationship with her mother echo the historical relationships between “mulatto” children and their black mothers. Women who birthed their master’s children were especially unlucky because the child became a tangible reminder of their master’s perverted performances. They were often torn between loving the child as their own and hating the child because he or she is an extension of the power that made her life miserable.

Many times, slave owners could free their slave children to reduce financial responsibilities and such was a common occurrence. The master could also free the slave mother of his children but this did not usually happen (Millward, 2010). Thus, slave mothers who birthed “mulatto” children often felt the pain of losing a part of themselves to their slave masters twice – first, when she was impregnated with an unwanted child, and second, when the child became wanted and was stripped from her. Not only were these tensions between the slave child and her mother troubling for the “mulatto,” but also the lack of a father figure was hurtful. Elizabeth Patterson, the daughter of her slave master named John Street explained her painful experience:

That was the greatest crime ever visited on the United States. It was worse than the cruelty of the overseers, worse than any hunger, for many slaves were well fed and well cared for; but when a father can sell his own child, humiliate his own daughter by auctioning her on the slave block, what good could be expected where such practices were allowable (Yarbrough, 2005)?

Patterson's experience is disturbing because it is unique from the stories of dismantled slave families. Like Patterson, many other mulatto children, she had no family to dismantle. Mulatto children were not born into families where they were embraced with love and a sense of belonging. Instead, they were born into a system and the hands that were outstretched were not to bring them in, but to keep a distance.

Some masters did develop sentiments for their "sex slaves" and the law protected their emotions. The Placage system developed during the French colonial era, permitted masters to participate in a "left-hand marriage." In these situations, the slave women would be given a household to maintain and while she was not treated as highly as a wife, neither was she treated as lowly as a concubine. A master's mistress or *plaçage* could also be purchased and usually lighter-skinned women slaves were chosen for this purpose. Although *placées* were considered legally free, they depended too heavily economically and socially on their husbands to ever be independent (Chieh & Vazquez – Nuttal, 2007).

Slave owners who "married" their enslaved wives were suspected to have feelings for their slave families since they could not detach from them. Thomas Jefferson was a primary example. According to Millward (2010), Jefferson was married to and conceived children with a slave named Sally Hemings. He had a hard time freeing his slave children

initially because he believed that African Americans were not meant to be free. Jefferson did free his slave children eventually, but he never did free Sally. It is up to historians to wonder the reasons why he kept her beneath his power – control, sexual desire, or love?

Whether or not slave owners actually had affectionate feelings for their “mulatto” children or their mothers was not the reason mulatto children were so resented by their fellow slaves. Disbelief in race mixing was the real reason why “mulattos” felt disdain in most of their relationships with whites and blacks. Mixing was considered unnatural and was treated with disgust. One former slave commented, “I think slavery is a terrible system. I think slavery is the cause of mixing. If people want to choose somebody, it should be their own color” (Yarbrough, 2005). For other slaves, “mulattos” did not fit in because they were reminders of their helplessness. An increase in “mulattos” was viewed as a threat to the black race. Slavery was already destroying African culture and now the white man was physically invading and destroying black bodies. Further, “mulattos” were seen as having a soft struggle because the masters treated them better - giving them extra shoes, clothes, and verbal affection. However, in reality, any love that existed between “mulatto” children and their slave fathers was contaminated by the fact that the slave master would always be a master before a father.

A negative perception of “mulattos” among blacks is evidence that blacks also upheld the racial hierarchy where white supremacy reigned. In some ways, it was easier to be a slave than to be a “mulatto” because “mulattos” were rarely accepted by either race and were referred to as “no-nation niggers” (Yarbrough, 2005). Their identities were perplexing because even though they were biologically black and white, they could appear to be either. In other words, mulattos could “pass” as either black or white, which

gave them a chameleon-like power to navigate through the power structure like blacks nor whites could before. For example, mulatto slaves who were lighter skinned could pass as white and live life as if they were free. Furthermore, the lighter skin and fair hair of some “mulattos” was also psychologically disturbing. When a “mulatto” slave who appears to be a white man or white woman is being sold on the auction block, it almost gave whites a sting of their own whip because it appeared as if one of their own who was being treated as a slave. Just as mixed-race slaves mirrored oppression to their black fellow slaves, mulattos reflected the evils of slavery into the white man’s face. Not surprisingly, white men turned to legislation to try and fix “mulattos” into an inferior position and to smoothen out the wrinkles mulattos’ created in their blanket of power.

The Mixed-Race Body

Many communication scholars place heavy emphasis on outside perceptions of the mixed-race body. Fascination with the physical appearance of the mixed-race body and its contribution to America’s racial hierarchy is prominent in many communication studies. Many scholars explain white America’s admiration of biracial individuals’ beauty with their “golden skin tones,” and “long dark hair,” which Dagbovie (2007) explains in her study exploring public acceptance and rejection of mixed-race celebrities Halle Berry, Tiger Woods, and Mariah Carey. There is an underlying curiosity about biracial individuals, yet an overarching white supremacy ideology forces people to examine them at a distance – romanticizing their physical appearance while still resenting their blackness.

Osei-Kofi (2013) explores deeper meanings of visual displays of mixed-race bodies during slavery and now. During slavery, compilations of pictures of “fair-skinned” “mulatto” children were sharply juxtaposed with images of darker-skinned slave children to provoke fear in Northern whites, who were disturbed by the images because they portrayed what their children would look like enslaved. Osei Kofi (2013) examines W.E.B DuBois and Caroline Day’s photograph collections of multiracial individuals and their families contrasted with visual narratives of racial hierarchy, which emphasize the sameness in humans regardless of their skin color and physical features. Their pictures though, only depicted subjects that captured the essence of whiteness. For instance, their domesticated subjects were surrounded by symbols of wealth or social status. Therefore, these images defend white supremacist values including patriarchy. Dubois’ and Day’s photographic collections place a focus on visual individualism – with pictures often containing one subject and biographical information in the captions – to suggest that multiracialism should be given its own racial category. Thus, upholding the idea that race and biology work together to help regulate bodies to racial categories.

Merril (2015) credits the obsession with mixed-race bodies to the fear of what their bodies expose and symbolize – white men raping their black slaves, the threat “mulattos” pose to forces responsible for enforcing the black and white divide because of how their ambiguous bodies allow them to transcend boundaries and occupy spaces with both blacks and whites, and most importantly, American hypocrisy. Goodale and Engles (2010) also trace American whiteness narratives to reveal Americans were always conscious of their biracial heritage but refused to admit it. Paradoxically, unlawful sexual behavior responsible for race mixing made it harder for lawmakers to maintain a strict

binary color line. Hasian, Jr. (2003) argues that law is performative in nature in the way it controls social norms and provides a basis of identity for citizens of a community. In earlier history, “racial etiquette” suggested that race could be determined by a person’s behavior. To be associated with whiteness and avoid being committed of a crime because of their race, mixed-race litigants had to “act white, look white or have doctors who certified them as white” (Hasian, Jr., 2003). Basically, biracial identity created chaos in what was once an orderly social system between blacks and whites and exposed white supremacy.

Identity Negotiation in the Interracial Family

Race mixing through sexual violence is another revealing facet of America’s vehement history and communication scholars believe studying modern romantic interracial relationships has the potential to provide insight into how humans can overcome racial differences. Interracial couples go through four communication stages – racial awareness, coping, identity emergence, and maintenance - to constantly reframe race images and dismantle existing social ladders (Foeman & Nance, 2002).

Individuals involved in interracial relationships have to constantly define their goals and values in a way that is not required in monoracial relationships (Lawton, Foeman & Brown, 2013). Each partner is willing to sign quasi-completed and co-created contracts, which means each partner understands his or her own worldview but are open to embracing their partner’s values (Jackson, 2002). Interestingly, ready-to-sign contracts do exist within interracial couples. For Jackson, these contracts usually only occur in interactions between minority and non-minority individuals. In such cases, the majority

individual is not willing to or has no need to learn or take on values that do not align with theirs. In interracial marriages, the minority identity does not necessarily have to be race-related but can be associated with gender or occupation. For example, an Asian spouse may be willing to sacrifice his or her “minority model” education values to fit the more Americanized values of his or her partner (Lawton, Foeman & Brown, 2013).

In the past, the sociology and psychology fields have centered their studies on biracial persons and their struggles with identity management while communication scholars are most interested in understanding representation of the mixed-race body. For example, in an analysis of *Alex Haley's Queen*, a television show featuring a biracial lead character played by Halle Berry, Orbe and Strother (1996) argue the show simply reinforces the “tragic mulatto” narrative through the portrayal of biraciality as “beautiful, yet threatening,” “inherently problematic,” and “leading to insanity.” Scholars are recently following after the sociology and psychology fields to conduct research about biracial identity negotiation and management. In a later study, Orbe and his colleagues Robert Harrison III, Lydia Kauffman, and Vanessa Laurent (2015) explore actual experiences of biracial women. Also using cultural contracts theory, they collect narratives from young biracial women to explain the evolution of the cultural contracts they sign as they attempt to negotiate their identities. They insist that co-created contracts are the hardest to maintain because identities and social contexts are constantly changing. Their most critical argument is that biracial identities must not be generalized but should be examined separately, because each person occupies a distinct space, whether geographically or structurally in terms of family. For example, one biracial child may

grow up in a predominantly white household while another may be raised with his or her African American parent (Orbe et al., 2015).

From Tragic Mulatto to Magic Mulatto

The election of the first African American president, Barack Obama, was a historical moment for America. After his election, many communication scholars and journalists ventured out to answer an obvious question: “Does an African American President mean America has overcome racism?” American publications treated President Obama’s election as a victorious moment for African Americans. Other mainstream news outlets portrayed it as an inevitable happening, an event undoubtedly brought about by a successful democracy. However, scholars like Siobahn Stiles and Carolyn Kitch (2011) do not think so. They examined coverage of Obama’s election to verify more probable themes circulating within society including: 1) different social groups project their own identities onto Obama, 2) there remains a public anxiety about race issues, and 3) there exists continuous mythic stories of America as a progressive society and the “American Dream.”

Some scholars reason that Obama’s ambiguous appearance allows Americans to project images on him because he is a “mirror for an international community of a frustrated desire for peace, hope, and change” (Mitchell, 2009). Further, Obama is the most visible president in America’s history because he has become an icon for visual culture; his face is printed all over t-shirts and coffee mugs. Also, large crowds push to see him speak and he maintains a strong digital presence. The opposing argument would be that Obama is the most *invisible* president because like the biracial Queen in *Alex*

Haley's Queen, his audiences choose to only see parts of his identity, usually the African American part.

Obama's election did, however, bring attention to race issues because of his physical appearance and his undeniable blackness. Public fixation with Obama's ethnicity led to endless scrutiny of his person from the way he talked to what church he associates with. Some scholars argue that Obama won the election *because* he is a minority while others credit his ability to embody whiteness (Smith, 2009). To some extent, Obama's ability to shift his language between articulate English (to appease his white audiences) and black vernacular (to appeal to black audiences) made him the popular candidate (Spears, 2014).

Obama's eloquent speaking style is apparent and journalists and academics alike attest to his rhetorical skills. However, few scholars have focused on the substance of his speeches and how *what* he is saying rather than *how* he is saying it indicates racial identity. For example, Isaksen (2011) explores how Obama avoids race issues in some of his speeches and confronts them in others. She claims that in doing so, Obama both comforts whites and uplifts minorities. In his study of white male commentary on President Obama after his election, Brown (2011) contends that Obama gained white support because he does not make them feel guilty or push the race card in their face. Clennon (2013) says it was not Obama's whiteness but his blackness that made him appealing to all audiences. In her argument, she delves deeper into the differences between African American and blackness, which is a unique spin on explorations of differences between blackness and whiteness. For Clennon, it is Obama's "commercial," and "marketable" blackness that made him "cool" whereas his association with African

American carried with it the historical narrative of slavery and the African struggle. Her exploration of the distinction between African American and black - though not fleshed out to its full potential - is important because it emphasizes that blackness is a generalization of how *all* African Americans *perform* identity.

Racial social underpinnings lay the foundation for scholars, including myself, who view Obama's rhetoric as carefully and intentionally maneuvering between his identities to appeal to various audiences, mainly his black and white audiences. Frank (2011) acclaims Obama's strategic rhetoric is an attempt to make Americans rethink logic engrained in western philosophy. He says oppositional binaries or the understanding of opposites passed on through Greek thought are "taken as mutually exclusive and exhaustive alternatives; *a choice is put in the form of either A or B*, when it may be that logically the possibilities *both A and B* and *neither A nor B are open.*" It may be because of this western thinking that prohibits some people from being able to automatically accept Obama for who he is as a whole person rather than selecting parts of his identity for self-gratification. Obama attempts to overcome racial binaries in his speech using a technique Frank (2011) refers to as a "cosmopolitan expression of American identity."

In America, race is not the only deciding factor in politics. Religion is equally as critical because religion and politics inform the other as evidenced throughout American history when Christianity often justified slavery. As a result, Obama's religious views were under close observation throughout his campaign. Meadows (2014) studied mainstream print news coverage of Obama's religious identity to understand public confusion about Obama's religious views despite his open discussion of his Christian beliefs. She observed that newspapers encouraged the common belief that Obama

switched his views from the Muslim doctrine to Christianity for political reasons. In her findings, those reasons are clearly implied as 1) the need for Obama to avoid association with Muslim principles, which many Americans equate to terrorism, and 2) the need to maintain religious credibility like many other politicians do, regardless of their race.

Dilliplane (2012) explains how Obama's religious controversy confronted him with challenges no other politician faced in their presidential campaign due to the intricacies of race, religion, and politics. Those challenges included 1) Obama's need to disassociate himself from his pastor, Jeremiah Wright, who was criticized in the media for making strong, un-American statements. At the same time, Obama had to support Wright's representation of African American communities, speak from the African American perspective without completely identifying himself as black, and lastly avoid becoming "the black candidate" to avoid being perceived as another angry black man fighting strictly for African American interests. It is important to remember the political constraints on Obama's performance of identity because there are inherent connections between external perceptions of mixed-race people and Obama's need to navigate those views in order to achieve favor.

After the media blew up the controversy between Obama and his pastor, many scholars like Dilliplane took interest in Obama's race speech, which addresses his relationship with Reverend Wright. Gunn and McPhail (2015) on the other hand, explore Wright's counter speech, *The Black Church Experience*. In their analysis, they note that Obama and Wright represent opposing tropes; Obama as the "good" negro, who embraces white vernacular and Wright as the "angry black man" who holds fast to black "slave" vernacular and blames the government for the woes of black people. While

Wright's speech was met with deepened division between races (whites sitting in the balconies refused to applaud while blacks sitting in the lower seats cheered and clapped throughout the speech), Obama's speech was universally praised. As many scholars recognize the shift from the original focus on religion in this controversy to race, Rowland and Jones (2011) think it was Obama's "secular" approach to Wright's commentary that makes his attempt to unify America successful in his "A More Perfect Union" Speech.

The racial complexities of President Obama's election and his representation as a black man who speaks well, which signaled that racism is still very much alive, make it no surprise that Obama's rhetoric became a hot topic for communication scholars. However, there is an important gap in the literature because scholars focus mostly on outside perceptions of Obama's identity, religious, political and mostly, racial. Only a few studies attempt to analyze Obama's rhetoric from his perspective. Nonetheless, these studies still only focus on the end-goals of Obama's rhetorical shifts (tonal, linguistic, and content) to help him appeal to multiple audiences. In my attempt to initiate a filling of the gap in the literature, I focus more on Obama's identity performance and what it means in terms of racial stereotypes and how Americans can begin to move beyond them as well as what biraciality contributes to America's race conversation.

Critical Approach

In my analysis, I apply Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which basically states that gender is a social construction materializes through biological justifications, language in the form of performative utterances and bodily performances. Like many

other scholars including Lewis Lowe and Homi Bhabha, I translate her arguments about gender to explain race as a socially developed phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, I also incorporate DuBois' double consciousness model to propose a new, more intense consciousness within the biracial experience, which I refer to as hyperconsciousness to explain how Obama's identity experience and performance enables his pluralistic dialogue.

Performativity

Judith Butler's theory of performativity relies on Foucault's idea that the body is a passive medium of expression. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains that the body is like a surface on which cultural identities are inscribed. In other words, the body is the first impression of cultural values that emerge on the body. Therefore, the body has been equated to expression of self for quite some time. Butler argues that doing so generalizes the body and essentially ignores it. Butler quotes Foucault's argument that "the body is the inscribed surface of events," where "events" refer to history or the "creation of values and meanings by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body." Thus, the body's "impulses with multiple directionalities" are as Butler says, "deconstructed" or "weakened" through the process of inscription. What gets lost in the event of inscription is what Butler is curious about. She asks, "How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth" (Butler, 1990)?

Butler's notion of performativity relies on what is invisible or hidden and the subject's desire or end goal of coherence of their performed identity with culturally

constructed binaries. Butler focuses on the man/woman binary, whereas I will focus on the black/white binary. She states:

... Words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* [sic.] of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a case. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (Butler, 1990, p. 137).

In other words, performativity is similar to an impersonation, a sly mockery of the social constructions of gender identities. Butler draws from Austin and Derrida, who claim the “performative enacts or produces that which it names,” and is repetitive, an essential proponent of the parodic nature of performativity.

Butler’s theory of performativity touches on the invisibility aspect that is inherent when the body is the first impression of a person. As noted in my literature review, biracial individuals are often deemed invisible because their ambiguous physical appearance is perceived partially as one full identity or is completely misinterpreted altogether. Further, notions of the subject as an actor who is completely visible to their audience visually but still invisible at their core (or true self) is precisely Obama’s position. As the president, all eyes are on him yet he is like a puppet trying to fit or perform a coherent identity based on cultural conceptions of him instead of being able to communicate his true self. Nonetheless, the later he gets into his second term, Obama has shown a more playful side in identity performance, showing off his cool, hip side in his

less serious speeches and appearances on satirical news platforms. Such acts illustrate Butler's theory of performativity as Obama plays with race performances to call attention to them through impersonation.

Justification

One of the weaknesses of existing literature on multiracial identity is that it maintains the prioritization of public perception of biracial individuals rather than giving them the agency to choose their identity. Multiracial persons are expected to conform to social norms of the identity that their physical appearance denotes rather than their interior self. Further, they are demonized for their hybridity through "passing" narratives, or hiding parts of their identity for political or social gain. My study aims to call attention to and subvert the tendency for communication scholars to study biracial identity through an external lens and attempt to investigate deeper the biracial experience from an internal perspective.

My thesis will also initiate discussion of how historical narratives of the "tragic mulatto" in America impact mixed-race individuals' ability to truly understand our core identities and how we choose to express ourselves in social situations. Obama is a unique subject because his presidential status and life experiences combine to involve various intersections of space, politics and religion – all of which are elements that influence identity performance. Obama's presidential status in the midst of social movements that have recently emerged such as #BlackLivesMatter present an opportunity to explore questions like where do biracial individuals fit within social movements? Are we

supposed to choose a side? Is it our responsibility to speak for and mediate between both races, black and white?

Since interracial relationships are becoming more common and mixed-race individuals are rising in prominence and will make up a large percentage of the American population by 2050 proves people are transcending racial boundaries in the most intimate, relational ways. A large biracial population signifies much-needed hope for Americans who have fought racism and social inequality. My study aims to delve deeper than surface level arguments about whether Obama identifies more with his African American heritage or his white background. Rather, my investigation of his performance of his hybrid identity reveals more about the historical gap between blacks and whites to uncover the *true* differences between the two rather than constructed differences between whiteness and blackness and to understand on a conceptual level how to recover what gets lost in the process of cultural inscription.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter of my thesis will include an introduction, significance of the study, a review of the literature and an explanation of my method. The next two chapters include a case study, each are eulogies for citizens killed by racial violence including Obama's eulogies for Reverend Clementa Pinckney after the Charleston, South Carolina church shooting in June 2015 as well as for the five police officers killed in the shooting in Dallas, Texas which happened a year later. I explore the performative nature of each text on the content and delivery levels. It is important to note that I analyze the speeches in both text format and video format to capture the entirety of Obama's delivery in all

performative aspects— “words, acts, gestures.” My last chapter includes a summary of my arguments, larger claims concerning my study’s contributions to the communication field and beyond, discoveries about biracial identity, and implications for future research.

CHAPTER 2

TO AWAKEN DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS: EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY IN OBAMA'S EULOGY FOR CLEMENTA PINCKNEY

Background

President Obama did not address issues of race in his first term as president and since *he* was not talking about it, the illusion of America as a post-racial society seemed more real than ever. When video footage of police officers shooting and killing Michael Brown, an unarmed African American man, erupted across the media, Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream was deemed utopic once again. Brown was not the first black man or woman to lose his life during an interaction with police officers, nor was he the last. A Google search of African Americans killed by police will return countless names of victims: Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Freddie Gray, Samuel DeBose, Natasha McKenna, Walter Scott, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, and the list, unfortunately, goes on. Deadly discrimination against blacks is a staple of American history and Obama's election did not erase that. The only reason *some* of these incidents received so much media attention and resulted in national protests was because they were caught on camera. African Americans finally had proof of the harsh reality many call "the black experience."

Black Americans were not shocked that prejudice and bias resulted in black deaths. Obama served as a voice for many African Americans as he explained to all Americans, "These are not isolated incidents. They're symptomatic of a broader set of racial disparities that exist in our criminal justice system." He then listed off statistics from multiple studies that show African Americans and Latinos are more likely to be pulled over, searched, arrested, abused, and receive longer jail sentences than whites

(Rehkopf, 2016). The images were a stark reminder for black people to not be content with the current situation in race relations in America. If the images of police abuse was not enough, then the continuous acquittals of white police officers who murdered innocent black men was another furious motivation for African Americans to unite for social justice. As a result, #BlackLivesMatter emerged from a hash tag and grew into a national organization for black liberation.

Another infuriating moment for African Americans came in the summer of 2015, when Dylan Roof, a 21 year-old white supremacist walked into Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina where a bible study group of 12 were having fellowship. The members welcomed Roof into the church and he sat with them for almost an hour before opening fire during the final prayer. Roof killed nine people and injured three. Roof claimed he felt motivated when he searched “black on white crime” after the shooting of Trayvon Martin (Hershey, 2016). Unlike many of the police officers who attributed their actions to self defense, Roof admitted his actions were wrought by racial hatred and because “no one else was brave enough” to stop black people from taking over the world. Roof was later sentenced to death, which was only somewhat of a relief for the African American community. His conviction juxtaposed with the officers’ acquittals sent the message that only whites who openly confessed to murdering African Americans would be convicted, regardless of how much incriminating evidence existed.

The location of the massacre, Charleston, South Carolina is permeated in American racial conflict from being a critical landmark city during the slave trade, to celebrating racist symbols like the confederate flag and monuments of American leaders

who were known for their racist views, to playing an integral role in the Civil War. The Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church is one of the few historical landmarks in the city that serves as evidence of African American history, a history that is often ignored in textbooks and museums. Charleston's oldest black church served as a gathering place for civil rights marchers led by Coretta Scott King. Additionally, Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King Jr. both preached from the church's pulpit and persuaded African Americans to push for social change. The church remained strong after enduring natural disasters and being burned for supporting Denmark Vesey, a slave who organized a slave rebellion that was never executed (Johnson, 2015). The church continued to uphold its legacy as its members gathered in worship services even in the midst of the crime scene where their fallen brothers and sisters were slain.

The incident's location and cause provided a unique opportunity for Obama to address race and gun violence within his eulogy for the pastor of the church, Reverend Clementa Pinckney. The *New York Times* reported that the president spent five hours drafting the speech, reworking it to flow in the theme of grace and pulling from his personal knowledge of history and scripture. Obama told his advisors en route to Charleston that he was thinking about singing some lines of the hymn *Amazing Grace* to emphasize the theme, only if, he noted, "it feels right." The speech turned out to be momentous for politicians and ordinary American citizens alike. In the same week that Supreme Court supported the Affordable Care Act as well as same-sex marriage, Southern politicians began discussions of disavowing the Confederate battle flag, (Kakutani, 2015).

So many changes in one week can potentially give Americans the impression that progress happens overnight there is remembrance that such a symbolic, racially charged act of violence against African Americans while an African American held the presidential office quickly deflates the illusion of a post-racial America. Roof's actions are a result of performative utterances throughout American history that create and sustain racial boundaries to designate African Americans as the "other," lesser, second-class race. Thus, Roof serves as an example of how discourse regulates a subject's position in society and how subject's embody and perform the meanings of identity within that discourse. Using Butler's words, Roof's "body is a historical situation... a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation." Roof admitted this exact intention in his confession during his interrogation with the FBI. He mentioned the need for someone to stop "black people from taking over the world." His intent to enact and therefore, reproduce racism created a rhetorical situation for racial issues and Obama proved to be the ideal leader for such a discussion. I say this not because he is known as the first African American president but because he is interracial, a trait that allows him to oscillate between racial performances to connect with audiences and persuade them to self-reflect on their own perceptions of race. Obama does not attempt to speak for or become one race or another, rather, his rhetoric challenges the very definition of identity and its associations with race, religion, gender, and other qualities used for identification. His rhetoric suggests identity has nothing to do with who one is in terms of one's visible body or background, but the experience one produces for others.

Early on in *Gender Trouble*, Butler explores when identity is considered a normative ideal rather than a descriptive account. She explains that normative ideals

determine which gender identities are appropriate or not whereas descriptive accounts explain what makes gender comprehensible and permits an exploration of possibility (Butler, 2006). Butler's consideration of a descriptive account of identity is similar to my proposed argument for Obama's rhetorical suggestions for a new meaning of identity. In the context of Obama's rhetoric, identity is more of a description of external experiences produced by a particular person and less concerned with categorizing the internal experience of an identity based on outward characteristics of the body. On the surface, a eulogy speech may not seem ideal for understanding Obama's identity. My aim is not to understand Obama's biracial identity but to understand how he navigates that identity. From this perspective, a eulogy offers interesting insight into how Obama perceives identity and how he constitutes the others' identities.

In doing so, Obama conducts a performative turn, a concept some scholars define as an alteration in terms applied to objects that change and broaden our perceptions of given objects (Berns, 2009). The performative turn, usually existent in narrative discourse, is an attempt to respond to and recognize bodies without voices and voices without bodies who desire a form of resistance to the master narrative that colonizes and marginalizes peoples (Langellier, 1999). In his eulogy for Reverend Clementa Pinckney, Obama uses his platform to speak for Pinckney and the African American church to establish experience as a new marker of individual identity to ultimately create a truly inclusive national identity.

In the next section, I examine Obama's ability to embody prescribed identities and experiences including Pinckney's, the African American church, and even civil rights figures like Martin Luther King Jr. to re-establish what determines individual identity in

America. He frames his words in a religious context to persuade his audiences that he is speaking to them under the influence of a divine force, which detaches his words from his body and proves Butler's idea of the body as a communication tool that materializes identity. Lastly, Obama's rhetoric draws on W.E.B. DuBois' theory of double-consciousness to support his conceptions of identity.

Mimicking Whiteness and Embodying Blackness

Obama begins his remarks praising God before mentioning a bible verse: "They were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on Earth" (Hebrews 11:13). The scripture projects an eerily similar visual of the same way members of the bible study met their death after they saw Roof from a distance and welcomed him inside their church. Perhaps they thought he was a curious newcomer looking for salvation. Regardless, because of their faith, they did not reject him on account of his white skin, or perceive him to be a racist hater of their congregation because they were African American, Instead, they believed in the innocence of his coming. The "they" in the bible verse alludes to the many characters in the bible who exhibited faith throughout their lives but did not see Jesus before they died, including Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Noah, Isaac, Jacob and so on. Obama draws parallels between these men and Pinckney, who also lived by faith and "believed in things not seen." Like the faithful in the bible, Pinckney knew "he would not receive all those things he was promised" but "believed his efforts would deliver a better life for those who followed." In this case, the promise is not Christ's coming and salvation, but the

constitutional promise of equality, liberty and justice that, like many minorities in America, Pinckney has not come to fully recognize or “see.”

Obama does not claim to know Pinckney well but recalls noticeable qualities about his character such as his kindness, his smile, the “reassuring baritone of his voice” and his “deceptive sense of humor.” He states that Pinckney’s friends commented that when Pinckney came into a room “it was like the future arrived.” He supports his statements with the genealogy of preachers within Pinckney’s family and said Pinckney “set an example worthy of his position, wise beyond his years, in his speech, in his conduct, in his love, faith and purity.” Obama credits Pinckney’s identity for his ability to be a pastor instead of the other way around. By describing Pinckney’s characteristics first instead of retracing his religious path, Obama reminds the audience that Pinckney’s identity transcends beyond his position in society. Thus, Obama proposes that one’s position in society holds the capacity to refine one’s identity instead of identity serving as a basis for what one does within society.

Obama reinforces this idea when he identifies Pinckney as a “good man,” before exclaiming, “You don’t have to be of high station to be a good man,” and that possibly being identified as a good man, “after all the words and recitations and resumes are read” is the best thing anyone could want said about them at their funeral. “Recitations” coupled with Obama’s repetition of the word “and” which denotes the daunting cycle of recitations and resumes incites Butler’s idea of the repetitive performative acts or “rituals” that inscribe meaning onto the body, meaning the body then produces and thus, sustains. Obama recognizes and disrupts this social entrapment through his own repudiation of the importance of “high station” while he stands as President of the United

States. Further, his disruption of the cycle of resumes and recitations and his suggestion that the true point of life is to become and be identified as a good man offers a new possibility for Butler's theory of performativity, in whatever context (gender, race, sexuality, etc.) to ends with the body. Once the body is done materializing whatever cultural inscriptions and meanings were placed upon it, then true identity can prevail.

In this instance, Pinckney is a representation of a voiceless body and a bodiless voice simultaneously. No longer able to speak for himself, Obama speaks for him in a sense, and when Obama quotes Pinckney in the latter parts of the eulogy, he revives Pinckney's voice in the absence of his body. Obama tells Pinckney's personal narrative to guide us through Pinckney's experiences as state senator for South Carolina, working in a place where poverty is rampant, education poor, and healthcare scarce – “a place that needed somebody like Clem.” He goes on to tell about Pinckney's experience as he strived to make a change and dealing with the political forces against him during the day and heading to the church at night. According to Obama, Pinckney “embodied a politics that was neither mean, nor small.” Obama's use of the word “embodiment” provokes a return to performativity and embodiment to understand their relationship.

Butler (2007) explains that performativity is the repetitive acts that constitute the body as matter. Therefore, the body is less a construction and more a materialization, which sets the framework for how the body enacts, performs, or does gender or race. Dyvik (2017) argues that performativity and embodiment are “intimately linked” because gender is embodied and performed at the same time as various degrees of masculinity and femininity are performed and embodied dependent on the context. Therefore, embodied performativity is “fluid and dynamic.” In Obama's description of Pinckney, embodiment

is conveyed as an experience that is absorbed and then passed on to others. Obama attributes Pinckney's character to the many examples in his family who have gone before him in the church and continuously suggests Pinckney's purpose for emulating those examples to the idea of moving forward with utterances of the future, and "those who follow" and imaginations of "what might be." Therefore, Obama frames Pinckney's life as a performative act, in and of itself, that reiterates the hushed performances of his descendants – all the way to the generations of Noah and Abraham in the bible. Pinckney's ability to "walk in somebody else's shoes and see through their eyes" is a direct explanation of how Obama understands and portrays embodiment, as empathizing with and taking on someone else's experiences and using it to create improved versions of that experience to "deliver a better life" for those who come after us. His vague wording invites multiple possibilities for future imaginings and refuses the underpinnings of performatives that produce normative ideals, which in turn, infer sameness and equality that ultimately exclude and deprioritize those who constitute the 'other.'

To broaden this notion of embodied performativity, Obama engages in a sort of meta-embodiment as he embodies and performs both Pinckney's identity as well as the identity or experience of the black church and community. When Obama told his advisors that he was thinking about singing the verses of *Amazing Grace* he was, unknowingly, exemplifying Butler's understanding of the relation between the mind and body. She writes, "...The ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy. The mind not only subjugates the body but also occasionally entertains the fantasy of fleeing its embodiment altogether" (2007). Obama's contemplative daring to sing during his

speech “if it feels right” assumes a degree of hesitation, which denotes his realization that he must break away from his body’s original materialization as President of the United States and step into a marginalized identity - a risky move for any president, especially one who has previously had to overcome his, in Butler’s words - “marked” body.

As most Americans know, Obama’s body disrupts the American presidential normative ideals, which iterate the same white, heterosexual and male normative Butler condemns in her writings. Like “sexed” bodies constrained from the moment doctors determine their sex and thus, their gender, Obama’s body is immediately visible and therefore raced. It is necessary that I dedicate thought to visibility as it relates to cultural inscriptions of the body, or the body as a site of meaning and to Obama’s conception of his own identity. Romo (2015) uses Butler’s relation between bodies and their meaning to surrounding contexts to explain how a subject becomes (in)visible. She explains how society governs what constitutes a private or public space and what bodies occupy those spaces. Bodies in the private sphere are regulated to invisibility while public bodies are worthy of being seen. She thinks of these public and private spaces as making up concentric circles, with the innermost circle being the most public space. The innermost circle represents the city or “preferred place in which citizenship is defined and contested.” Her theory is evidenced in processes of gentrification, minority representation or lack thereof, social and economic inequality, and so many other areas where the focus is predominantly on privileged groups at the expense of minorities.

Ralph Ellison reflects in(visibility) in his novel *Invisible Man* about an African American narrator who is dealing with the frustrations of being invisible not because he is actually undetectable, but because whites refuse to see him. Multiple authors and

bloggers recognize the similarities between Obama's autobiography, *Dreams from My Father* and Ellison's work. The structural parallels between the two pieces are essential to my examination because both works are bildungsroman in nature, meaning the narrators participate in some form of psychological exploration and growth. Additionally, both narrators explore their racial identity to understand how racism influences their societal position. Obama's psychological journey leads him to the realization that he can take on multiple identities while Ellison's narrator tastes human connection and sporadically finds places where he is both seen and heard, but ultimately realizes that the color line will forever bound him to invisibility (Samuels, 2008). Both narrators are extremely conscious of their black heritage and Obama, who is partially white, seems more curious about his African American heritage. Since he grew up with his white grandparents and had little to no exposure to his Kenyan father and family members, it makes sense that his instinctual interest lies most with that side of his family. What is curious is his decision to fully embrace his African American heritage and almost reject his European background when he labels himself African American when he filled in his answer to the race question on his 2010 US Census form (Roberts & Baker, 2010). Although it is common for traditional black leaders to reject their white background, Obama is not directly linked to the racial controversy in America since his father is from Kenya (not a descendant of American slaves) and his mother was white, it is not like his birth was the result of a slave rape but of two people falling in love. Perhaps Obama's motive was to claim his spot in history as the first African American president. Regardless, it is clear that Obama's understanding of identity is deeper than penciling in a circle on a form. Obama's raced body, for him, is a rhetorical tool. His skin is light enough that, when

presented with articulate and proper English can make his blackness invisible to whites. For blacks, his image is one of hope because he negates many of the stereotypical depictions of blackness in the media and throughout history and offers the most visibly positive representation of blackness. As a result, racial performances are a way for the former president to relate to his varying audiences in different rhetorical situations.

Obama conducted one of his most successful racial performances at Pinckney's funeral. His audience consisted mostly of African Americans, many of whom were religious. In this scene, Obama faces a different kind of pressure. Outside of the usual burden to carefully avoid a rhetorical style that many whites would deem "too black" and stick to the mainstream story of American history that often excludes figures like Angela Davis, Malcolm X and Jesse Jackson (Terrill, 2015). In this space, Obama must perform a blackness that is authentic or real. African Americans in his audience undoubtedly wanted to see if Obama could relate and speak to their struggle, if he could empathize with their pain in a way only a fellow black man could. In my own biracial experience, a marked body does not pass as black by itself. Authentic blackness can be dismissed as "fake" if you talk, move, or in any way, act "too white." Jackson (2005) gives a more specific example when he argues that an African American who is also an outstanding student may be perceived as "acting white." Like many other African Americans, especially those of us with fairer skin, many African Americans critique Obama on his ability to perform his blackness, a judgment criteria that relies on Jackson's (2005) own definition race as an outward expression of inward identity. If the external expression matches the internal identity, then the performance should be fluid. If not, then audiences may perceive the performance as inauthentic. Therefore, if Obama truly feels black, then

he should have no problem performing black. Different perceptions of what constitutes blackness and thus, authenticity creates stereotypes that ultimately restrict a subject's agency as they attempt to define their identity. Butler seconds this notion when she writes, "...the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (2007).

Obama did not go through life unaffected by authenticity. He will be the first to admit, as he does in his memoirs of his awkward attempts to be black. He will also admit that he feels a strong desire to be black and throughout his life, has given himself "instruction on how to be black" (Terrill, 2015). Psychoanalysts like Lacan and Kristeva might argue that Obama's desire to understand his black heritage was most likely awakened in the mirror stage of his life when he understood the boundaries of his identity in relation to his surroundings when he saw himself as separate from his mother. Later on, Obama would notice the absence of his father who represents the abject or the disruption of identity coherence and continuity. Therefore, Obama's curiosity about his blackness is an attempt to fill a gap in his identity. Butler explains Kristeva's argument that "Even the 'first echolalias of infants' and the 'glossalalias in psychotic discourse' are manifestations of the continuity of the mother-infant relation" (Butler, 2007). It is not my goal to contest or support Kristeva's argument but to use echolalias and glossalalias to transition into my discussion of language as an expression of identity.

Walk, Words and Actions: Expressions of Identity

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics defines echolalia as the “mechanical repetition of words just uttered by another speaker” (2014). Many scholars argue that echolalia is symptomatic of a speech disorder often associated with autism, a logic that renders the sounds meaningless. Kristeva suggests that the “first echolalias of infants” is not meaningless in totality but is a child’s attempt to maintain continuity with the maternal figure (Butler, 2007). I agree with Kristeva in this regard, however, the other half of her argument that glossolalias are also attempts to sustain the mother-infant relationship is questionable. It is important to recognize that Kristeva’s argument is grounded in sexual development while my paper aims to understand identity expression in the form of language in biracial individuals, Obama specifically, which requires some exploration of identity development. Here, I am arguing that echolalia for Obama is the natural language of his mother. Language in this sense is not simply learning how to speak English but also how he spoke standard English, most likely taking on “white speak,” as some scholars call it.

Many scholars and writers have worked to understand the relationship between language and its link to colonialism, slavery, and oppression. bell hooks (1994) examines Adrienne Rich’s poem *The Burning of Paper Instead of Children* to explain how enslaved Africans used language as a form of resistance. Her focus on the line “This is the oppressor’s language yet I need it to talk to you” reflects Kristeva’s view of poetic language as a possibility to dismantle the dominant paternal “Symbolic language.” Audre Lorde’s arguments are consistent with Butler’s in her essay *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.* A black lesbian feminist, a triple-threat combo to

the white, heterosexual patriarchy, she addresses how “society’s definition of acceptable women” creates a divide between those who fit that definition and those who do not. Additionally, toleration of difference under the guise of reformation is “the grossest” because it deepens separation even among individuals who are considered different. She argues that categorical attempts to organize difference inhibit creativity and multiple ways of being. Lorde would disagree with Butler’s notion of creating an endless list of identity categories, which may only “allow us temporarily beat him at his own game [sic.], but they will never bring about genuine change” (Lorde, 1983). “The master,” “the oppressor,” and the “Symbolic” represent the same voice that has dominated America’s performative history, the heterosexual, white male voice.

Ann Dunham’s (Obama’s mother) voice acts as an echo of the “standard English” hooks describes as the buttress of domination and Obama, like many minorities, aims to break away from that language in Pinckney’s eulogy. In several of his previous speeches, Obama upholds standard English, articulating his words, and carefully controlling his sentences for proper grammatical structure. In his eulogy for Pinckney, Obama breaks away from his tendency to uphold the rules of the English language that, hooks says, “limits and defines” and permits himself to slip into glossolalia Csordas’ (1990) argues glossolalia is a “phenomenon of embodiment” to explain how language is a gesture that makes use of the body to take an existential position of meaning in society. Obama’s loose speech heard in the rise and fall of his tone, in a slight, sly chuckle when he states an obvious fact that is common sense to his African American audience, yet still so foreign to those considered outside of the homogenous audience and sudden singing of *Amazing Grace* is a direct example of hooks description of how to use language to resist:

Needing the oppressor's language to speak with one another they nevertheless also reinvented remade that language so that it would speak beyond the boundaries of conquest and domination. In the mouths of black Africans in the so-called "New World," English was altered, transformed, and became a different speech. Enslaved black people took broken bits of English and made of them a counter-language. They put together their words in such a way that the colonizer had to rethink the meaning of English language (hooks, 1994).

For hooks, black vernacular is not a dumbing down of the English language, but a disruption of the oppressors use for the language to "limit" and "define" black bodies. Her fear of losing her southern black vernacular in academic spaces and her continuous failed attempts to incorporate it in her scholarly writing is only more evidence for her argument just as Obama is still forced to use articulate English or "white speak" when he stands at the most powerful podium in the world. Nevertheless, Pinckney's funeral required Obama to stray away from exclusive speech and in turn, offered him a chance to speak about race relations in the United States from the black perspective through a glossalalic speech that was once foreign to him as well as to the rest of mainstream America. By doing so, he embodies the African American experience to reflect on and express the black experience through language on a stage that does not usually receive national attention.

For example, Obama claims that the people who often asked Pinckney why he chose to be both a pastor and a public servant "didn't know the history of the AME church." His chuckle gently condemns those who are not "brothers and sisters of the AME church who know that we don't make those distinctions," and subtly condemns the

hypocrisy of traditional American Christianity often used to justify racial injustices. Although his attempts to connect with his African American audience might be viewed as a betrayal of white audiences or an attempt to exclude them, he later recounts the history of the church to inform them, and thus, includes them. He explains how in African American life, the church serves as a place for blacks to find sanctuary, worship places for slaves, rest stops for fugitives, “bunkers for the soldiers of the civil rights movements, and presently, community centers for citizens to engage in professional development, and more importantly, a place where black children are “told that they matter,” a clear echo of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. By crediting the black church with the progress of black communities, Obama discounts repetitive accounts of mainstream American history that often ignore black history to further oppress black communities. He declares laws that prohibited African American assemblies in the church “unjust” instead of brushing over them as often done in presidential rhetoric. At this point in his speech, Obama’s embodiment of the black church experience is most apparent. His voice begins to emulate the same “reassuring baritone” he noticed in Pinckney and he takes on another form of language that many scholars associate with glossolalic, ritual language. Csordas’ (1990) writes:

In playing on the gestural characteristic of linguisticity, speaking in tongues is a ritual statement that the speakers inhabit a sacred world, since the gift of ritual language is a gift from God. The stripping away of the semantic dimension in glossolalia is not an absence, but rather the drawing back of a discursive curtain to reveal the grounding of language in natural life, as a bodily act. Glossolalia reveals language as incarnate, and this existential fact is homologous with the

religious significance of the Word made Flesh, the unity of human and divine (25).

Although Obama is not necessarily speaking in tongues, which many linguists describe as unintelligible utterances and sounds (Dodson, 2011), it is the linguistic notion of a divine force possessing and influencing a speaking subject that is critical to my examination. If Obama was influenced by a higher power to give the speech that he did, then that increases the ethos of his statement and hushes any criticism toward his choice to denounce America's hidden controversial past and finally, reveal the truth. When he starts his speech with "Giving all praise and honor to God" he insinuates that his words are not his, but God's. A verse in the King James Version of the bible reads:

But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what you shall speak, neither do you premeditate: but whatever shall be given you in that hour, that speak you: for it is not you that speak, but the Holy Ghost (Mark 13:11).

Obama's salutation is a way to humble himself before his religious audience, an attempt to detach from the religious undertones that justify African American demarcation and a move beyond the color line. To do so, Obama interpolates listeners as God's people in a "sacred world" and establishes a new binary that disregards race and gender as bases of judgment and relies instead on people's deeds, which determine whether they are good or bad.

Obama's rhythmic inflections throughout his speech coupled with religious undertones contrast his usual rhetorical performance that parallels the rhetoric of presidents who have gone before him like Abraham Lincoln, Bill Clinton, and Ronald

Reagan. In this particular speech, he is almost overzealous with words like “hallelujah” and recounts of “God’s grace,” before going on to declare the African American church a “Phoenix” that continues to rise from the ashes. He recognizes the former presence of Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights marches that started at the church’s steps to call forth the repetitiveness of history while also outlining progress. His bodily presence is evidence of that progress. More specifically, his embodiment of the church’s history through glossalalic echoes of King and Pinckney together, and telling of American history in totality, influenced by a higher power, at least seemingly, is arguably one of the most critical performative turns in presidential rhetoric for African Americans. Obama’s rhetoric does not follow discourse that “hide the disenfranchisement, oppression, and injustice suffered by people marked by differences of race or class, gender or sexuality, language or religion,” as John Michael describes in his book *Identity and the Failure of America* (2008). Perhaps African American voting participation rose during Obama’s election periods because they felt included in his rhetoric. In other words, his choice of words illustrated his consideration of all citizens, rather than a select few who fit the original “citizen” construct that so often excludes and oppresses certain groups.

Obama does not exclude any groups in his rhetoric based on their prescribed identities (race, gender, religion) but he is dismissive of those who do not uphold the standard of a “good man” through their actions. He does not identify Dylan Roof by his name, but refers to him as “the killer” whereas he explicitly states Pinckney’s name as well as the names of the other eight church members who were killed. He also affirms his local and national audiences when he passively congratulates them for responding to the “evil act” with “big-hearted generosity” and “thoughtful introspection and self-

examination.” His compliments indicate his assumptions and expectations for citizen behavior in crisis situations and also serve as a call to action. Especially for those whose actions do not align with his expectations, his comments awaken a sense of double consciousness in all his audience members, an awareness of their two selves, good and bad and a longing to embrace one or the other. In *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois describes double consciousness in the context of his own experience as an African American male:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (1903).

From Obama’s religious context, double-consciousness, more explicitly, is awareness of oneself through God’s eyes, of upholding oneself to heavenly standards while knowing one’s humanness and helplessness without God, who looks down on us with mercy and “amazing grace.” The two sides of each human are body/soul, good/evil, and human/spirit. Every body is a dark body, not in aesthetic appearance, but metaphorically evil because the body is sinful flesh and the soul is pureness of spirit. A dark body is a body that cannot see the light only made visible by the spirit.

Blindness, in Obama’s rhetoric, is a dangerous unknowing associated with uncleanness. He says the killer was “blinded by hatred” who “could not see the grace surrounding Reverend Pinckney and that Bible study group.” The killer’s inability to see is reminiscent of the blind men in the gospel stories. Jesus performs miracles by curing

the men, a sign of salvation reflected in Obama's definition of grace as the "free and benevolent favor of God." Grace must be given and received to rid oneself of blindness.

Obama acknowledges that America's eyes, too, were once closed and thus, America was once a nation full of sin. He says that God's grace "allowed us to see where we've been blind." He then performs a confession of American sins that instigate "systemic oppression and racial subjugation." He follows the process of repentance that starts with admission of one's sins in order to become cleansed and ultimately, changed. Obama's request to take down the Confederate flag, a symbolic remembrance of the civil war fought over slavery, represents a cleansing and willingness for repentance and would only be the first step toward true change and salvation, a message that resonated in his own presidential campaign. He calls Americans to ask themselves "tough questions" about the sinful nature of America that causes poverty, poor education systems, hate, and injustice. Obama calls for continuous expressions of God's grace through "recognition of ourselves in each other." Thus, double-consciousness emphasizes an awareness of others and thus, makes us more conscious of who we are, good or bad, and how our actions are impacting others.

Overall, Obama's utterance reflects Butler's (2007) theory that a speech act can aim to (re)-define identity. He sings a line of a familiar song, "Amazing grace – how sweet the sounds, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind but now I see" to explain the process of becoming self-aware through the recognition of others. An experience he endured in his own biracial life, of noticing what made him different in the mirror stage, a moment of self-reflection that opened his eyes to his prescribed position as an outsider. The same kind of moment America experiences

after the church shooting, a time that necessitated a self-reflection or consciousness awakening that results in a desire DuBois (1903) describes as a “longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.”

CHAPTER 3

TOWARD A NEW AMERICA: RECOGNIZING RACISM THROUGH PAINFUL EXPERIENCES

Background

A little over a year after the Charleston, South Carolina church shooting, another massacre occurred in Dallas, Texas. This time, lives were taken in the name of black supremacy. The killer, 25-year-old Micah Xavier Johnson said he was upset with the recent police shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile and he wanted “to kill white people, especially white officers,” according to Dallas Police Chief, David Brown (“5 Police Officers Killed,” 2016). Sterling and Castile were shot and killed by police officers within two days of each other. Both shootings were caught on video and spurred protests around the nation, including Dallas, Texas where Johnson shot and killed five police officers and injured seven other police officers and two civilians. News outlets referred to the event as the worst, meaning deadliest, attack against police officers since the September 11th terrorist attacks (Park, 2016).

In the context of times when police officers killing African Americans seemed to be a regular occurrence and their acquittals equally as consistent, Johnson’s actions could almost appear righteous if one does not take time to understand the root of the situation. Digital activism was at its peak as social media users began posting their thoughts and opinions and indicated their stance on whether #BlueLivesMatter or #BlackLivesMatter, a disagreement that reiterates the fateful faults of the color line. Thus, Johnson’s actions were largely unproductive for American progress, especially for the #BlackLivesMatter movement because he removed focus from police injustice toward Sterling and Castile

and all of the other African Americans whose lives were lost in police custody as well as demonstrations of the democratic process as he literally dismantled a peaceful protest.

President Obama, all too familiar with speaking at memorial services at this point in his presidency, addressed American citizens at the Dallas Memorial service much in the same way an exasperated parent corrects two immature children fighting against one another. In his speech, he addresses a multiplicity of perspectives - black, white, police officers, and civilians, to explain and condemn America's current state in regards to race relations. Of course, his speech was an attempt to unify a nation swollen with racial tensions yet, his comforting tone is often conflicted with frustration over generalizations not only toward African Americans and other minority groups, but police officers as well who he says are asked "to do too much." He does not hesitate to point out the ignorance of those who heed these simplifications and produce rhetoric that condone violence toward others.

Obama's remarks in remembrance of the five police officers who were killed is critical to understanding how Obama navigates his biracial identity because of the clear demonstration of Bitzer's rhetorical situation. When police killing black men and black men killing police are juxtaposed chronologically, it is necessary for the leader of the country to discuss the underlying cause of violence among citizens. Regardless of whether policemen are simply "doing their job," there is cause for concern as to why they are unable to arrest an "armed" black man who did not kill anyone and take him into custody alive just as they would a white man who possesses several weapons who killed nine people. Further, when a black man feels he can no longer rely on the justice system and feels it is his job to avenge black people by killing white officers there lies a serious

problem. Since Obama is the president of *all* people, and racism is affecting *all* people, he has no choice but to make race the focus of his speech.

Fortunately for him, his biracial identity equips him with the ability to address multiple sides of the race argument credibly and effectively. By doing so, he denounces idealistic images of America and paints with pragmatism a raw picture of the disunited state of America. He draws attention to social constructions of race that cause people to recede into their “respective corners” resulting in a lack of conversation about the differences that divide us, which ultimately allows dominant and oppressive American rhetoric to prevail. In this chapter, I argue that Obama’s biraciality, although not mentioned in this speech, allows him to embody multiple perspectives to persuade audiences to envision American identities that do not necessarily fit into categorical binaries. In other words, there is not one American experience, and thus, there is not only one white or black experience. Obama’s rhetoric expounds on Butler’s idea that culturally influenced acts constitute identity rather than being separate expressions of identity. Also, his rhetoric suggests that our social location determines what acts make up our daily routines but that does not mean those mundane acts define our identities. Instead, it is when we disrupt the performative utterances that make up our lives, when we defy our social inscriptions and act in ways that disrupt the performative utterances that sustain socially constructed, categorical identities (race, class, gender, occupation, etc.) that one determines their individual identity or character.

To Belong Nowhere is to Exist Everywhere

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, a common experience for biracial persons is realizing that one does not “fit” into any one group. There is a process where one moves from being double conscious to hyperconscious, or aware of oneself in relation to multiple groups. At the mirror stage moment, when we realize we do not match our parent(s), we understand our twoness and hence, develop double-consciousness. It is not until we engage in the public and understand the world beyond black and white confines that we understand the nature of our hybridity and ambiguity. For example, my peers often ask me “What are you?” to categorize my body based on their perceptions of my appearance as Latina, Indian, Muslim or black. Upon discovering that I am simply “biracial” or “mixed,” they usually become less curious and more uncomfortable. Few go on to ask which of my parents are white and the other black before stopping the questions altogether. In these interactions, multiracial persons begin to understand their displacement.

Although this experience is common (at least from what I have read and discussed with many of my biracial friends and acquaintances), the response is often different. Some of us strive to perform one race over the other to forge belonging in one group, and others, like Obama, use it as an advantage. If one belongs nowhere, then one can exist everywhere. Terrill (2015) provides an example of how Obama utilizes his biracial identity from David Maraniss’s biography *Barack Obama: The Story*, when he reports that Obama’s classmates identified him as a “floater” moving from culture to culture. He seemed to use his father’s anthropologist skills to be, as Terrill (2015) quotes, “a

participant observer, sitting on the edge of a culture and learning it well enough to understand it from the inside, yet never feeling fully part of it.”

My argument is an echo of Terrill’s, in that Obama’s ability to understand different groups without becoming defined by them is what allows him to write and speak from multiple perspectives. I disagree with Terrill when he argues that Obama is provoking his white and black audiences to what he calls democratic double-consciousness, or to be aware of themselves through the eyes of the other. His argument is problematic because such a motive would be inherently fruitless since it maintains a clear black and white divide. Terrill’s argument parallels that of the phrase “Put oneself in another’s shoes.” Even as one stands in another’s place, one is still in one’s own body. Therefore, there are limits to how much one can truly embody and empathize with others’ experiences. Democratic double-consciousness is, at first, intrinsically productive, especially in the American context, because it would result in a long-awaited recognition of marginalized bodies and experiences. However, constant recognition of ‘the other’ in democratic discourse is merely an acknowledgement of oppression while ultimately sustaining it.

Thus, I propose that Obama’s rhetoric in his eulogy for the police officers prompts a hyperconsciousness in his audiences, or an awareness of the color line and its role in one’s own social location, thoughts, and experiences and how it impacts how people perceive and categorize one another. By prioritizing self-consciousness in relation to others with an emphasis on the pluralization, there is a chance one might begin to recognize themselves as part of a cosmopolitan society where one’s actions impacts an entire group – a group that shares a national identity but includes a multiplicity of human

differences. Obama's speech reflects this notion and is, as Terrill argues, intentional because he continues to rely on a narrative of national identity but recognizes that national identity involves a plethora of experiences.

The memorial is a time to mourn all five police officers who lost their lives and Obama gives a short biographical summary for each officer at the beginning of his speech. Structurally, he states their name before going on to tell of their life focusing not on their race, background, or political beliefs, but on what their life entailed when they were "on duty" and "off duty." He says that each of them, despite the danger, "answered that call" to serve as public servants to protect their communities. Then, he gives a sentence or two that gives insight into their personal lives. For example, Lorne Ahrens "bought dinner for a homeless man," Michael Krol "brought his girlfriend back to Detroit for Thanksgiving," Michael Smith "could be found at church or playing softball with his two girls," Patrick Zamarripa "liked to post videos of himself and his kids on social media" and lastly Brent Thompson, "married a fellow officer." It is those moments that truly form their identities.

The five officers share a common identity as police officers – but each had a life of their own, a specific experience, and they understood that their identity depended on the community and their protection of that community, hence why they "answered that call" and "shared a commitment larger than themselves." Obama identifies this commitment as the law, which Lisa Lowe (1996) defines as an "apparatus that binds and seals the universality of the political body of the nation." For Obama, the law, is not solely used for regulation but also protection of American unity. Police officers protect and maintain the law, and therefore, protect and sustain American identity. Obama

addresses that during the protests, the officers must have disagreed with some of the opinions written on protestors' signs, because they, too, come from a distinct American experience. Yet, they helped to organize the protest because they believed in the "constitutional rights of this country." Obama mentions how "Two officers, black and white, smiled next to a man with a sign that read, 'No Justice, No Peace.'" It would be shortsighted to think that Obama uses this example to focus on the historical disparities between blacks and whites but really, he uses it to show that even people with the starkest differences can come together. Through juxtaposition, Obama refused to choose a side, as some may have hoped he would. Rather, he recognizes that "Americans are struggling right now" and refuses to identify with any particular sub-group when he discusses the divisions within America. For example, he states, "We wonder if the divides of race in America can ever be bridged. We wonder if an African-American community that feels unfairly targeted by police, and police departments that feel unfairly maligned for doing their jobs, can ever understand each other's experience." Obama uses first person plural to include himself in the American community, without completely identifying or siding with one group. He is able to then remove focus from his black or white identity and emphasize experience. Thus, his suggestion that he may not share the same experience as African-Americans who feel police treat them unfairly does not mean he intends to ignore that specific American experience, nor does it mean he is not African American or that the African American experience is lesser or unimportant.

Butler reasons that using the grammar of an "I" or "we" assumes that subjects can come before or stimulate their various identifications but she soon rejects her own presumption because a subject cannot exist without an assumption of some identity,

whether sexed, raced, or some other mark (Butler, 2011). Nonetheless, Obama moves from “We” and “I” to navigate his individualistic and communal identities, which support Butler’s idea that identities depend upon one another as she explains how the boundaries of whiteness require association with and proximity to blackness (Butler, 2011).

In fact, by mentioning the African American community in general, Obama highlights a community of people who constitute ‘a nation within a nation’ (Gates, Jr., 2010). But he also recognizes that a common history does not constitute sameness. A radical, yet logical idea because when Africans were brought to America, they did come from various African regions. It was not until they arrived to America that they “spoke a common English vernacular” (Gates, Jr., 2010). Despite their shared experience within the slave trade, and their urgent need for English to communicate with one another in order to resist oppression, their ideas about how to resist varied. Hence, why it is important to know black leaders not only by their names, but also for what they represent for the African American community because they do not all take the same resistive approach, then or now. Several scholars recognize Gates Jr.’s (2010) claim that “while most definitions of nationhood or peoplehood stress commonality, very few focus on the ways in which people within a common culture disagree” (Gates, Jr., 2010), precisely what Obama is persuading the American people to understand.

Obama does not ignore his unique position as President of the United States. Instead, he attributes his categorical identity for his perception of America. For example, since his presidency increases his involvement in crises situations he understands such moments differently than many Americans. He quotes a witness from the incident who said, “It wasn’t about black or white. Everyone was picking each other up and moving

them away.” Obama then says, “That’s the America I know,” a line he repeats to refer to different accounts of when American people were able to look beyond their individual experience and do or yearn to do something for the greater good and “recognize that we are one American family.” He states:

Now, I'm not naïve. I have spoken at too many memorials during the course of this presidency. I've hugged too many families who have lost a loved one to senseless violence. And I've seen how a spirit of unity, born of tragedy, can gradually dissipate, overtaken by the return to business as usual, by inertia and old habits and expediency. I see how easily we slip back into our old notions, because they're comfortable, we're used to them. I've seen how inadequate words can be in bringing about lasting change. I've seen how inadequate my own words have been. And so I'm reminded of a passage in *John's Gospel [First John]: Let us love not with words or speech, but with actions and in truth. If we're to sustain the unity we need to get through these difficult times, if we are to honor these five outstanding officers who we've lost, then we will need to act on the truths that we know. And that's not easy. It makes us uncomfortable. But we're going to have to be honest with each other and ourselves (Obama, 2016).

The “habits” Obama mentions are categorical performances and perceptions of those performances that make falsehoods about human identity – race, gender, sexuality, etc. – concrete. He declares change must come from collaboration between our words and actions and that words alone do not work to dismantle identity labels. At this point, Butler's notion of words as acts of doing is challenged on a conceptual level. Throughout

America's history, language is used to disguise and recreate truths about human identity in order to separate and oppress peoples. Obama's rhetoric, on the other hand, demands Americans to acknowledge words as weapons, especially when they sound appealing. He warns citizens of rhetoric that mask America as a free and just country while his body is a condemning symbol of America's hypocrisy and his hybridity is "a celebratory sign of diversity and mixedness" (Werbner, Modood, Bhabha, 2015). In this way, he physically brands his message of hope because he proves that two races can come together and literally create change.

Furthermore, Obama condemns divisive rhetoric from multiple sides of societal arguments, mostly debates over what lives matter, especially when that rhetoric results in crises situations like the one witnessed in Dallas. He urges citizens to work backwards in a sense, to perform actions that reflect the truths of human identity in order to make America a sincere united nation. He says, "We must act on the truths that we know," and doing so requires that people defy the mistruths so long abided. He applauds citizens who have illustrated how to find and live by truth – including the police officers who did not regard race a factor when they "answered that call" to defend their communities - Mayor Rawlings, Chief Brown, protestors on behalf of criminal justice who also joined in the mourning for the dead police officers – people who do not decide what is right or wrong based on color, but instead on the basis of humanity. These moments, these actions breed new truths, and reveal authentic representations of personhood that transcend social categories and cultural inscription to provide glimpses of true self.

Biracial Bodies and the Revelation of a New Reality

Action places more emphasis on the body, which Raka Shome and other scholars understand as the site of struggle and primary racial signifier, which ultimately supports racial structures because non-white bodies become easily identifiable and thus oppressed. The indistinct interracial body, though, complicates the organization of race. In other words, interracial bodies force people to question supposed realities of race. For example, prevalence of mixed-race bodies negated the theory that whites and blacks could not interbreed and if they did, the offspring would suffer birth defects. Ironically, the stark variations in skin tone made it easy for whites to differentiate themselves from non-whites. However, when customary sexual violations of black slaves led to large populations of mixed-race offspring and disproved the theory that white and black blood could not be mixed, whites had a harder time maintaining and justifying racial boundaries. Although slave rape was a legal and regular known occurrence in American society, it soon endangered white supremacy.

“Mulatto” children were born slaves but their white fathers could free them if they pleased. Some “mulattos” who were not freed could pass as white if their skin was light enough, which became dangerous because they could disguise themselves as slave masters and free other slaves. Once whites recognized the risk of the “mulatto’s” hybrid body, linguistic characterizations of interracial intimacy were revisited. For example, degrading names such as “maroon,” “mulatto,” and “half-breed” were commonly used to describe mixed-race children, regardless of whether they were free or enslaved. Blacks as well as whites also began to be criticized for their intimate relationships outside their race. “Nigger in the woodpile” was an expression that denoted sex between a white and

black person in a hidden place. Such language was meant to prompt whites to refrain from sexual interaction with blacks and return to “purity.” Additionally, blacks were painted as a sexually uncontrollable species. Black women were represented as seductive beings while black men were symbolized as “Black Beast Rapists” (Goodale & Engels, 2010). Hence, these linguistic cover-ups attempted to place mixed persons at an equally low status with blacks, establish whites as victims of interracial sex, and demonize race mixing overall.

Race mixing did not decline, though and private sexual relations between whites and blacks rose to the public domain. America’s biracial heritage could no longer be ignored when the nations own leaders and their interracial relationships were exposed. Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and third president of the United States had a prominent influence on race relations in America. Jefferson pioneered human rights in the Enlightenment era, rights that were predicated on his belief that race coincided with behavior and intellectual and emotional capacity. Nonetheless, Jefferson’s beliefs about blacks did not stop him from falling in love with a black woman named Sally Hemings, having an affair with her, and marrying her after the death of his white wife. His love for Hemings was said to be more than a suspicion, especially after the likelihood of his fathering six of her children was proven. Throughout his life, Jefferson tried to justify the contradiction between his ideologies on race and his love affair with a black woman. Jefferson continuously degraded Africans and mixed individuals as he stated:

In general their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection.... in memory they are equal to whites, in reason much inferior.... in

imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous...I advance it therefore.... that the blacks, whether originally a different race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to whites... (Hattery & Smith, 2010).

Contradictions in Jefferson's private and public life depict the stubbornness of American ideologies at the center of racial hierarchies. Love, which is hypothetically one of the most powerful motivations, was not enough for Jefferson to reconsider his feelings towards blacks while in the position to end slavery. Jefferson's situation was a common one. Yet, America's shock toward mixed-race children is reminiscent of the same shock that Mary, a virgin, could birth baby Jesus, Bantum (2010) argues. He writes that it "is in the intimacy of these transgressions and the puzzle of their fruit where we begin to identify personhood," or as cultural theorist Homi Bhabha suggests, the "location of culture." During "intricate invasions" to use Bhabha's term, we are faced with situations where the public and private sphere become confused and force us to consider differing possibilities of reality.

Obama emulates fairer-skinned biracial slave children on the auction block who portrayed for slave owners what they would look like suffering as slaves – a moment of psychological disturbance for any white person. But for African Americans, Obama was a different re-imagined reality, he represented the possibility for a black person to become president, to overcome social obstacles and break free of black stereotypes. If Obama's experience is anything like mine, he has experienced, to some level, the shock often associated with his racial makeup. And if he were anything like me, he would not understand it initially because his reality was not the same as the outside world. Later, one comes to understand external reality and where one belongs within it. In a powerful

position of power, Obama holds the potential to explain, propose, and persuade his audiences to perform more intricate invasions that will ultimately create a new reality, a process that Batum (2010) describes when he writes:

The possibilities of humanity are the fruit of this “intricate invasion,” the birth of a child to a young woman. It is this encounter which must be understood, for this claim takes place in the midst of an encounter, but also breaks open the possibility of lives to encounter and be encountered in a radically new way, disrupting the rhythms of daily life and collective aspirations (p.88).

Obama addresses the routineness of daily life, “most Americans each day, you get up, probably have too quick a breakfast, kiss your family goodbye, and you head to work” or when we “turn on the TV or surf the internet, and we can watch positions harden and lines drawn” and juxtaposes common reality with his reality. He says, “I’m here to say we must reject such despair. I’m here to insist that we are not as divided as we seem.” He then begins to describe America’s progress and the “decency” and “goodness” he has seen in Americans, from the Dallas police officers to Shetamia Taylor, a mother who shielded her sons from the bullets and later thanked the Dallas Police for their heroism.

President Obama’s life is most likely far from the normal routine of the average American who lives within the social boundaries that have been set over time. Being the first biracial president, Obama explored, disrupted and overcame many social boundaries. Additionally, he witnesses the good and bad sides of America up close and consequently, sees more intricate invasions that permit him to understand America more in depth than most citizens. He says, “In this audience, I see what’s possible – I see what’s possible

when we recognize that we are one American family, all deserving of equal treatment and deserving of equal respect, all children of God. That's the America that I know.”

Embodying Experience through Hyperconsciousness

Obama invites his audiences to hyperconsciousness through embodiment. Remember, Dyvik (2017) closely relates embodiment with performativity in the sense that to embody an utterance, regardless of the categorical identity it reinforces, means to use one's body to take on and perform that utterance. However, Obama urges his audience to disembody utterances that empower racism and embody humanity through others' experiences. Within this argument, the body again, becomes the primary focus because without one's body, one cannot experience. Ireland (2004) traces experience debates in humanities over the last three decades to understand its relation to identity, agency, and social movements. He recounts that lately, experience does not only exist in academic discussions but has also become a part of the public sphere where citizens draw upon immediate experiences to form identities that do not fit hegemonic norms. He notes that experience has become a problem for scholars and citizens alike because it has long been conceptually misunderstood. Therefore, it is possible its links to complex ideas about agency, identity, and ideology have also been misconstrued.

In this section, I aim to explore the links between the body, subjectivity, experience, and agency. Beginning with the Foucauldian framework that correctly explains how power structures participate in subject-formation whether they are discursive, material or technological (Vlieghe, 2014). Butler enters the conversation at this point to further explain more specifically how discursive acts mark bodies as raced

and sexed. Lois McNay problematizes Foucault's notion of the body as a product of power as well as Butler's response that bodily identities are shaped through constraints. She claims that such arguments further strip the body of subjectivity, identity and agency (1991). She later contends, precisely, that materialist scholars like Butler and Foucault "rely on simplistic divisions such as base and superstructure, reality and representation in order to assert the primacy of economic forces in their analysis of [women's] oppression" to maintain material and cultural analysis as two separate entities. In McNay's view, gender is a "lived social relation," or "location within symbolic or discursive structures" (McNay, 2004). Her position resonates with Bhabha's location of culture in which he explains how identities are formed on a conditional basis, meaning dependent on one's geographical, physical and psychological standpoint to an original, supreme identity. Like Bhabha, who understands and eloquently explains how identities are deeply involved in "traumatic events of global histories" (Bhabha, 1994), McNay too, recognizes that gender as a categorical identity is much more complex than simple outward bodily representations. To explore this, she attempts to connect experience with agency, which requires a conceptual and theoretical tracing of experience.

Returning to Ireland's (2004) declaration of experience as a problem for humanities scholars, McNay seconds this notion and provides further explanation. The epistemological trouble with experience is its validity as a form of knowledge because 1) it is not possible to have an objective experience and 2) is closely related to emotion and affect, therefore it rejects heteronormative reasoning, which I argue could make experience an ideal foundation of knowledge for feminist scholars. McNay recognizes that it could also be dangerous because it is "unexamined" and therefore unaccepted.

Nonetheless, McNay (2004) agrees that since scholars have not adequately operationalized experience, it can be useful in forming consensus among oppressed individuals to create - she quotes Joan Scott – ‘an assumed, stable and shared meaning.’ It is important to note here that although shared experiences legitimize oppression, it is critical that common experiences do not overshadow differences within those experiences. In other words, as previously argued, there is not one American, black, white, Middle Eastern, or Hispanic experience. Experiences are very much individualistic but are situated within multiple collective experiences that span from local to global. Obama’s underlying message expounds on McNay’s primary disagreement with Butler and Foucault – that bodies can actively participate in self-formation instead of passively performing identities prescribed onto them. Bodies do not have to be constrained by labels or experiences. To perform beyond categorical identities or labels is to alter one’s experience by impacting others’ experiences. One cannot fully understand their experience outside of the context of others’ experiences similar to Butler’s argument that identities depend on the existence of other identities.

Hear My Hurt, Feel My Pain

To relate experience directly with the body is to say most basically, that experience is sensory. Watts (2012) dedicates thought to experience and its relation to affective intensity, or “a measure of the strength and duration of the impact of an experiential encounter.” He defines experience as our surroundings moving in and through us and denies that any experience is identical to another because of affective intensity. He also notes that humans have a strong desire to label sensations and

experiences and use language to do so. Since affective intensity from experiences originates on the surface of the body and, as Watts (2012) states, “mark us and we, in turn, punctuate them. We ‘locate’ them in times, spaces, activities, and relations,” it is understandable how people use language or shared symbols to generalize experiences. Watts’ and many other scholars are correct in demanding that no experience is the same, otherwise there would be an undeniable universal definition for the most striking experiences, or the most intense affective intensities like love, hate and passion. If language were adequate enough to articulate the variability of human experience, there would be no need for any other form of expression. But my point is not to delve into a Burkean discussion of language and symbols, rather to dedicate thought to voice, the most immediate expression of affective intensity.

For Watts (2012), voice is “the most essential quality *of*[sic.] being human.” It signifies one’s “felt experience” through vibrations. Voice is an audible attempt to signify an event but falls short of making a description or statement about the event. I am not so concerned with defining voice as I am with its connection to publicity. I find Watts’ arguments about voice requiring a hearing that often does not come before the voice dies compelling. The temporality of voice is indeed intellectually captivating because it signifies urgency for human experience, especially since language hardly ever captures an experience in totality - like pondering what death feels like for one who has not yet experienced it knowing that one cannot truly know because anyone who has felt it no longer has the capacity to explain it. Similar to the provocative question of whether there is a noise if there is no one around to hear it, Watts declares that voice is a shot at

publicity that is only successful if members of a community recognize it. Watts illustrates this point with a scene from *Blazing Saddles*:

Cleavon Little is harshly rebuffed as the first black sheriff in the all-white town of Rock Ridge. As he strolls the town's streets trying to greet the citizens, an elderly woman shatters his fantasy of racial harmony by deflecting his salutation with her blunt reply: "up yours nigger!" But when the town is threatened by a giant outlaw called Mongol, the townsfolk plea for the sheriff's help. After the sheriff stymies Mongol's rampage, the old lady privately offers him a pie and apologizes for the earlier racial slur (Watts, 2012).

Within this scene are a plethora of complex issues involving race relations but it makes sense for rhetorical scholars to first focus on what is happening or not happening in the public and private spheres. Watts makes the claim that the elderly woman missed an opportunity to make a change by not apologizing out in the open. I will return to this argument later on. First, I want to point out the parallels between Obama, the first black president and the first black sheriff in the scene. Both were ridiculed on the basis of their race before given the chance to prove themselves yet both were called upon to do something in times of crisis. The Sheriff was expected to take down the Mongol and Obama was looked upon to end racism in a sense, as if a man could do that alone.

Often for Obama though, doing something meant first and foremost, to say something. And moving backwards from Watts' arguments about language and voice, Obama acted as the voice for all Americans or the potential for publicity, to use Watts' terminology, especially for blacks and whites because racial conflict is usually attributed mostly to these two groups. There was an unspoken pressure from citizens for Obama to

choose a side in his statements - to condemn one side or the other by articulating one particular American experience and ignoring others. Many Americans during some of the most recent and visible acts of racial violence, wanted their experience expressed and more importantly, heard. As President of the United States, Obama's voice had the most potential of achieving that goal. The desire to be heard is the "shared interests" that persuades community members to acknowledge a voice and participate in the "processes of identification" to form a public (Watts, 2012). Although selfish and narcissistic, it is human nature to victimize oneself in times of conflict and prioritize one's pain over others.' Humans also want to claim hurt to excuse wrongdoing or somehow convince ourselves that we are doing something against our will. Comparable to the way slave masters called whipping or killing slaves a sacrifice (Watts, 2012).

Anyway, pain is inherent with victimization and it is no surprise that "hurt" appears four times in Obama's eulogy for the Dallas police officers because when a loved one dies, hurt is usually the response of those left behind. Obama reflects Watts' interaction with Elaine Scarry's ideas about the possibility for pain to be productive, to signify to the body that something is wrong. Obama reflects this notion of America's sickness when he states, "All of it has left us wounded, and angry, and hurt. It's as if the deepest fault lines of our democracy have suddenly been exposed, perhaps even widened." His words give the image of an uncovered, untreated wound that is growing worse with time and is in urgent need for treatment. Race is America's infection and isn't it American to think that a simple injection of the first Black president would make it all go away? Nonetheless, the shootings are evidence that having a black president was no

quick fix to the illness that pervades America and Watts' startling words are reflected in America's reaction to both incidents:

The gulf yawning between white and black folk seemed immense and its jagged slopes presented treacherous travel. Du Bois understood powerful affects black folk: "Outside this physical shrinking which we have in common with children, comes the mental recoil—the disinclination to have our thoughts and ideas disarranged and upset. And still further on comes the moral dread of blame—of facing the man we have wronged and *hearing the hurt* from his own quivering lips" (Watts, 2012).

Obama refrains from placing blame and declares, "No institution is entirely immune" and instead proposes a first step to the healing process - we must first admit to the cause of our pain and to recognize the pain of others. "To have your experience denied like that, dismissed by those in authority, dismissed perhaps even by your white friends and coworkers and fellow church members again and again and again – it hurts," he describes what the black sheriff must have felt when the elderly woman chose only to apologize for her racial slur in private. Her apology is an utterance that does not offer publicity and therefore, reconstitutes racial structures and only adds insult to injury, an injury her and the Sheriff both share.

Notions of sickness tie in easily with hyperconsciousness because self-consciousness often accompanies illness. When one becomes sick, especially with a serious illness such as cancer, one is aware that their body is performing at less than its full potential. Then, self-consciousness becomes hyperconsciousness when others are around because the subject is either concerned with what others are thinking or if they are

contagious, spreading their diseases. The latter speaks more to the hyperconsciousness Obama wants for his audiences when he discusses the importance of recognizing each other's experiences to "break this dangerous cycle," the constant transfer of disease that will soon worsen to the point of death.

Obama's utilizes words like "head" and "heart" to indicate commonality amongst humans and he relies on symbols of sameness to evoke embodiment of others' experiences to ultimately understand how to change them. For instance, he says "with an open heart, we can learn to stand in each other's shoes and look at the world through each other's eyes, so that maybe the police officer sees his own son in that teenager with a hoodie who's kind of goofing off but not dangerous" and of course he juxtaposes this with the teenager envisioning the police officer as his parent. He illustrates the ability to embody experience in a comment he made after Trayvon Martin was shot when he said, "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon," a statement no other president before him would have said.

Biracial bodies are able to embody experiences arguably more readily than easily categorized bodies because they are able to move through spaces they would not necessarily occupy otherwise. For example, a white man might not enter a barbershop in a predominantly black neighborhood but a mixed man can. On the other side, a black man may not enter into a predominantly white space either unless maybe his white mother accompanied him. So it is not solely the ambiguous nature of our bodies that allows us to observe and have irregular experiences, but our circumstances also. Mostly, it is precisely the relationship between our bodies and our environment that makes our experiences unique. Relying on Watts' (2012) idea that experience is our environment

moving in and through us, biracial citizens within a racially divided environment specifically America in this context, offers peculiar experiences because our environments have not yet figured out how to interact with us. This is not to say that we are special or that our experience is somehow supreme, simply that our experience is not as passive as that of a non-mixed person because responses to our bodies are almost always reactive. The inability to label us immediately coupled with a common unwillingness to talk openly about race and simply ask, results in several incorrect assumptions about our racial make-up. Thus, I have personally experienced prejudice from multiple race perspectives – including Hispanic, Black, Indian, and Middle Eastern. Therefore, it is almost natural for biracial persons to embody experiences that do not fit our racial make-ups because society has been conditioned to move with us in that way. In other words, we can be treated as another race in any minute because our ambiguous bodies are often perceived incorrectly. For example, I am often thought to be Hispanic, Indian, and sometimes Arabian. Therefore, it is a common experience for me for someone to walk up to me and begin speaking Spanish even when they do not know the language or ask me about my religious beliefs or stare at me awkwardly without saying anything at all. Therefore, under the assumption that experiences are our environments moving in and through us, the environment's movement is not fluid because no experience happens under the same precedents because our bodies reject the black and white rules of our environment.

Biracial experiences come with their own affective intensities but within them, there comes a profound understanding of race and its irony. Humans have become so assured yet so perplexed by race and differences that we can no longer see what is

human. I notice it when white people search my face for enough evidence of blackness that they completely miss my whiteness and blacks do the same. I am not innocent either because while they are searching, I am desperately trying to prove that I am black or white enough. Nonetheless, there is a blessing in biraciality because it gives one the privilege of feeling pain pluralistically. You can locate pressure points because you have a microscopic view of the hurt that has invaded your environment. You have seen it, heard it, experienced it in ways others have not.

CHAPTER 4

DON'T PUT ME IN A BOX: WHAT BIRACIAL EXPERIENCES CAN TEACH US ABOUT RACE

“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

~ Maya Angelou

During a time when America should have been at a social peak with a non-white president in place enforcing policies to prioritize underrepresented groups such as legalizing same sex marriage, America was actually experiencing a social crisis. Citizens engaging in vulgar violence toward one another and using race as justification for their actions indicates truth in Butler's arguments about performativity. Despite social and economic improvements, both drastic and slight, performative utterances have created and maintained deadly disparities among races. Violent uprisings and protests under a “black” president suggest that racial issues in American society are still fresh and more sensitive than most ever realized. Looking through the theoretical lens of performativity necessitates a magnified understanding of the intersection of race in terms of mind and body. Since the mind and the body are possibly the most intimate parts of a person, performativity disallows the formation of arguments that are anything other than vulnerable. More critically, the taking away of a person's mind and body because they are raced is the most personal offense, especially since the justification defies all logic.

Nonetheless, colonization displaces non-white bodies as Trevor Noah, a biracial comedian from South Africa, discusses in his stand-ups. He points out that colonization not only displaces bodies from their original culture but also requires them to conform to and become another culture. Fanon (2008) explains the relationship between bodies and

the world in his excerpt *The Fact of Blackness*. He notes that movement throughout one's environment in terms of functional movement to complete a task, is directly related to what he calls "third person consciousness," or the understanding that one's body is surrounded by uncertainty and movement is motivated by implicit knowledge. Therefore, schemas about certain bodies are not necessarily imposed or ascribed to those bodies as much as they are a "definitive structuring of the self and of the world," Fanon continues, "definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world." Fanon's statement is most closely a description of embodiment and how bodies materialize language and ideologies, a process that every body in America participates in, nonetheless, Dylan Roof and Micah Johnson's racial performances are extreme examples of how race rhetoric comes to life while Obama's embodiment of racial identities is in some ways, a mimicry of whiteness and blackness. Consequently, he demonstrates how race is an effect of discourse and therefore, reveals potential for agency, which Butler writes, "are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed."

Barack Obama standing as a biracial president while images of white police officers abusing black bodies were spread all over the media and black bodies were lashing back at police officers in the midst of protests presented a unique rhetorical situation. Obama was presented as the mediating body - the coming together of two races in unity. Foundational to Terrill's (2015) claim that Obama's inventive rhetoric provides a refreshing method for citizen discourse or way of speaking to one another, Obama's bodily presence and visibility at such an emotional and racially charged period of time for America was story-like, especially since there was heavy discussion about a post-racial

America after his election. Clearly, the shootings indicated urgency for presidential discourse. However, the overall context of the shootings under a minority president signified a rhetorical situation better yet understood as a rhetorical emergency, or a need to examine the history of American rhetoric in its entirety and its role in how bodies move in and through American society. Butler's performativity fundamentally links the body with language instead of treating them as separate entities, which allows scholars to begin to understand race as a complex experience. Language creates the schemas that alter how individuals move in and through their environments, which logically connects with Bhabha's location of culture and Watts' discussion of experience and affect to support my argument that language is a tool that can capture and express experiences in order to encourage understanding of others' experiences and lead to an embrace of difference. Since language is another criteria for oppression, as hooks, Lord and Kristeva all contend, then it can be and has been used as a method for resistance and Obama does precisely that. Not in the sense of speaking multiple languages, but using the dominant language, English, to express multiple American experiences, from the actual words he spoke to how he chose to speak them.

Obama engages in a sort of rhetorical cleansing for America. First, he addresses America's imperfections and the lasting impacts of wrongdoings like slavery, Jim Crow, miscegenation laws and other injustices toward minority groups. His willingness to discuss black history in presidential discourse is imperative because it is so often ignored and also, it offers recognition to citizens who still contributed to America's foundation and progress, even when they were not acknowledged as citizens. Secondly, Obama ensures his language is inclusive, regardless of what tone or voice he speaks in. He

recognizes multiple perspectives in his speech and does not subliminally speak to one particular audience. In fact, he does the opposite. He understands that America is a cosmopolitan nation and his pluralistic rhetoric reflects that. For example, he explicitly lists the various identities that make up America in terms of ethnicity and when he speaks of specific people he defines them beyond their race and focuses on their occupation, family, and actions. As a result, he recreates original assumptions of who is an automatic citizen to include those who are normally rhetorically excluded from citizenship.

It is interesting that healthcare was one of Obama's most controversial policy dealings in a country suffering from a self-inflicted infection. If speech acts are acts of doing, then America spoke its reality into existence, a reality that consists of race and division. The shootings are mere markers of that reality. Obama's eulogies for the victims are an attempt to begin the healing process, to speak a new reality into existence. It may seem unreal that so much racial violence would occur in a country whose leader is proof that two races can merge together as one, yet it is almost righteous that such ironic circumstances would happen in a country founded on paradox. During his presidency, Obama faced and upheld many of America's unfair, contradictory expectations – to be white but not too white, to embrace his blackness but not too much, to talk about race while also staying away from it, and all the while, fix all of the other policy issues in America. Despite whether citizens believe Obama did anything for America in terms of policy, rhetorically, he was one of the most productive presidents because of how he speaks about race, identity and citizenship.

As a presidential candidate, Obama's identity was attacked on all accounts including his race, religion, and citizenship. Like many of us, Obama remembers trying

to understand his identity within regulative discourses before leading the way in transforming that discourse to fit and support multiple identities. Nonetheless, Obama does not spend his time defending or trying to reestablish his identity, doing so would be unproductive. Instead, he interrupts patterns of discourses that label him and so many other “outsiders” to redesign American identity. He interrupted that pattern first, with his body. Butler’s theory of performativity offers intriguing connections between the mind, body, and language. Her theory gives a strong basis for exploring how Obama’s mixedness enables him to conduct a performative turn in America’s race narrative.

Obama’s mixed-race body is immediately visible and raced as any other non-white body is. Throughout history, black bodies were devices in their own oppression; Foucault and Butler would say bodies are passive mediums. Inferior bodies were constantly at the mercy of whiter, more powerful bodies and could be raped, beaten or killed at any time. Biracial bodies were not excluded from such happenings and it is not my argument that the experience was worse, but I do argue that the experience is somewhat different because biracial bodies were confusing for whites and blacks, as well as for the souls within those biracial bodies. The discourses that were set in place during slavery did not readily regulate biracial bodies and therefore they were displaced – not quite belonging with their black brothers and sisters in the field nor pure enough for their white brothers and sisters playing in the house. Obama is a visible example of how biracial bodies are culturally inscribed, often incorrectly. As Butler argues, his body was a critical first expression of his cultural values and he had to use his body as an instrument to overcome criticism because his body was constantly policed for too much

blackness or too much whiteness – a situation no president before him dealt with because there was no pressure to choose and perform a certain race day in and day out.

Foucault and Butler understand that the body is not separate from the mind, nor is it separate from culture or nature. Since it is not its own distinct entity then it must be an expression of those things. Therefore, it is not illogical that Obama could feel the awkwardness in his swagger or only want to sing *Amazing Grace* during his eulogy for Reverend Pinckney if it felt right. Obama could have been talking about the atmosphere in the room when he said this, but he also could have been referring to the alignment between his mind, body and maybe even his spirit. He had to have known that the majority of his audience members would be African American, and he understood the church's historical importance for black people in America and therefore, he knew his "blackness" would be more welcomed in this audience than any other. Therefore, he did not hesitate to articulate his English words more loosely, lessen the stiffness in his body as he moved from side to side during his speech, and slide in a sly chuckle to emphasize what seemed to be inside jokes between the black people in the room. That day, Obama gave the audience what they wanted and needed to see. They needed to see a President who looked, spoke and thought like them. They needed to see that he identified with his blackness because that meant he understood theirs.

In this sense, Obama did not simply perform blackness but he embodied it. Since his father was not an African American, one could argue that his lineage is not necessarily linked to the same struggle as many other blacks in America, a fact that could easily lead many of his audience members to discredit him. Obama not only demonstrated the knowledge of black history in America but he acted as a mouthpiece to

deem that history *American*. He spoke within that symbolic space and recognized it as a sacred place and spoke in tones that emulated the voices that spoke in the church, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Reverend Pinckney himself. Some might argue that only using names like MLK Jr. in the speech only reaffirm mainstream history, which is true in some sense. On another note, it is possible that he most closely relates to MLK Jr.'s message and vision of hope, since they share many rhetorical attributes such as their tone of voice and religious frames. Regardless, mentioning black bodies killed by racial violence, he gives a body and a voice to the bodiless and voiceless, and revives them. Instead of his body continuously being a passive medium, Obama uses his body as an active medium to take on the cultural values of his citizens and act as a mirror on which they can see themselves.

With this idea, Lacan and Kristeva's mirror stage comes full circle and the moment that differences are noticed in the beginning of a process that usually leads to difference and division, Obama embraces and embodies those differences with a chameleon-like intimacy. Perhaps imitation is the greatest form of flattery because it is an attempt to conquer difference by embodiment. To be willing to become the difference is a powerful method of connection, similar to trying to speak another person's language. Instead of Obama trying to understand himself in the context of the outside world, he camouflages into his external environment to help his audiences understand themselves in a world where they may feel no sense of belonging. This ability to embody multiple experiences and to speak from multiple outside perspectives makes his invisible, ambiguous body a palette for Americans who come from various cultural backgrounds to ascribe their own image onto. His tendency to oscillate between voices and play with

personas not only illustrates that social constructions of race permit its performance, but that performing race also negates its existence.

Additionally, Obama does not reduce his audiences to their distinctive races, but relies on the overarching symbol of “man” to equalize everyone, including himself. From that standpoint, race is no longer attributed to good or bad. In Obama’s rhetoric, race exists only as an effect of American history and a starting point for America’s future. It is not representative of a man’s identity rather, the actions he commits within and beyond his social location. The religious nature of his rhetoric emphasizes equality among humans and reestablishes double consciousness in the sense that his audiences examine themselves through the eyes of God rather than understanding themselves through the eyes of other human beings. Doing so, removes concern with judgment of identities based on race, and establishes actions, choices, and words as new ground for judgment, which inspires an awareness of one’s body that is unrelated to color and more focused on one’s interaction with others, or experiential creation.

Obama’s gift for connecting with racially divided audiences in even the most sensitive scenarios during times of death shows that experiences can be embodied. In each of his eulogies, Obama speaks to the experiences of the dead as well as common American experiences. He discusses the daily life of Pinckney who was a public advocate for his community by day and pastor by night. More importantly, he spoke to the experience that Pinckney provided for those around him, experiences that would cause most to recognize him as a good man. By doing so, he resets the black and white binary to a good and bad binary and resets the standard for humanity to establish a new focus, a different double-consciousness - one of self and soul, of human and spirit. Underneath

these religious values, Obama calls his audiences to self-examination under religious discourse, a discourse that does not regulate skin color but actions so that citizens will no longer measure their worth by their whiteness or blackness but by the experience they create for others. Therefore, double-consciousness, in this context, does not mean to look at oneself through the eyes of others, but to “measure one’s soul by the tape of a world” that relies on good and evil. A person’s twoness is no longer his blackness or his whiteness, but his human body and his spirit or his soul, which opens up the possibility for people to understand themselves beyond their human body, to look beyond identity markers such as race and gender to suggest that their worth is not confined by social parameters.

However, to be self-aware under the terms of good and bad does not relinquish the consequences of a society that has long lived under a black and white binary. Certainly, people continue to occupy a certain social location that is the result of the longstanding social experiment in America. Obama’s rhetoric does not ignore that reality, especially in his eulogy for the Dallas police officers. He acknowledges the various American experiences. He does not limit the black experience to one common experience and neither does he do this for whites or any group. More importantly, he does not limit the American experience to a black or white experience but recognizes that America is made up of many cultures including “black or white or Hispanic or Asian or Native American or of Middle Eastern descent,” and he states that “we have all seen this bigotry in our own lives at some point.” At this moment, Obama attempts to reconcile the need for each group to be the dominant victim and recognizes that every American is a victim,

but he also recognizes that each of us is part of the crime because we continue to participate in the cycle of abiding by and recreating the meaning of race.

At this point, that double-consciousness transforms to hyperconsciousness, or self-consciousness that relies on mindfulness and consideration toward others and their distinctive experiences. Obama's biraciality inherently produces hyperconsciousness because in order to mold himself to a particular identity, he must first comprehend the identity. Further, the fact that he is made up of two races that have continuously clashed throughout history innately inspires a need to understand those identities within that historical context. Therefore, it is no surprise that many journalists describe parts of his speeches as miniature civic lessons. Anyway, Obama urges his audiences to engage in the same exploration of identities, to understand their identities in terms of the experience it creates for them and not to stop with labels. Hyperconsciousness is "hyper" because it involves an intense awareness of oneself and others not with the goal of separating oneself from others, but to understand oneself as connected with others. Hence, movements and actions transform from an effect of discourse to a cause of discourse. In other words, citizens can become motivated by the idea that their actions create their identity rather than their identity constrains or produces their actions.

Obama urges his audiences to understand each other's experiences, especially in his eulogy for the Dallas police officers. He focuses on each of the officers' individual experiences before broadening his discussion to various experiences within American society, from the experience of fear toward the justice system to fear of criminals within one's own neighborhood. Of course, such experiences are often attributed to certain racial categories but Obama persuades his audiences to go deeper than that, to recognize the

multiplicity of experiences that are felt within each group. Thus, awareness of those various experiences and more critically, self-awareness of how we might help shape those experiences results in hyperconsciousness. To understand human identity in the context of another person's experience is so intimate because it requires a move away from narcissism and willingness for insecurity. It is not an uncommon feeling for biracial individuals because our identity already relies quite heavily on outside perspectives and we often try to create an experience for others that mimic their definitions of blackness or whiteness. Thus, our bodies contour to different movements and shapes and we experiment with our voices in ways many people do not have to because we are trying to fit into a mold that truly only exists in the minds of others. Thus, biraciality comes with hyperconsciousness because one's sense of self consists of an external dependence.

Hyperconsciousness yields opportunity for understanding how the process of performativity works. With a sense of intense mindfulness, one might not fall into their daily routine lightly, moving through their environment obeying subliminal commands to perform male, or female or black or white or powerful or powerless, but one would move through society with the purpose of producing a positive experience for others. Although seemingly idealistic, Obama provides evidence that it can be done when he describes how the police officers sacrificed their lives to perform their duty to protect other citizens, and Shetamia Taylor who threw her body over her sons to shield them from the gunshots, and Reverend Pinckney who fought for his community members' civil rights as well as their spiritual lives. It is done in the moments that disrupt the utterances that Bhabha (2012) notes have forced upon us "a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting."

Scholars from various fields have perpetuated DuBois' vision of the color line, as it is usually the foundation of any race discussion. However, there was another less promoted proposal by freed black men in 1816 that is unfolding in America. In response to an assembly of men called the American Colonization Society (ACS) led by U.S. House Representative Henry Clay who were pushing for black emigration in order to solve America's racial issues, freed black men joined together to form the Counter Memorial. The memorialists insisted that black emigration was not the right solution for racial violence in America. Instead of separation, they proposed amalgamation. They claimed that through "interaction, intermarriage, and procreation, the distinction of color would pass away." Thus, prejudices would pass away easily. Of course, their solution was viewed as "radical" and "obscene" (Stillion Southard, 2012). The rise of interracial marriages in America today, though, proves their prediction to be natural and logical. With multiracial populations growing three times as fast as the entire U.S. population, according to the Pew Research Center (Multiracial in America, 2015), race is likely to become less and less visible over time and Americans will be challenged to start a new conversation, one that does not begin with "What" but "*Who* are you?"

Bodies have always been identified and categorized based on their visual markers, whether through skin color to determine race or reproductive organs to determine sex. As time goes on, such identification strategies are going to become less distinctive. Bodies are going to become more ambiguous in their appearances, particularly in terms of race. So far, bodies are lenses for understanding society from different perspectives, because the body is a medium for experience, a claim that is evidenced in the way bodies tell stories of struggle and colonization as slavery's scars go beyond the skin and hybrid

bodies show how two races can come together and mend history's wounds. As bodies become less identifiable, they become a more active medium in identity formation. Identities will rely less on cultural inscriptions and more on movement within and through society.

Throughout my work, I have tried to suggest that the recent racial violence in America pressured Obama to speak about race and deflate the illusion of a post-racial America. Such instances broaden Bitzer's definition of rhetorical situations as events that require discourse and propose that history is the larger discourse that is causing events like the shootings, which more closely aligns with Richard Vatz' perspective of the rhetorical situation. Understandably, Bitzer's view gives legitimacy to rhetorical studies, my argument coupled with Vatz' understanding emphasizes the need for scholars to examine how language is received. Therefore, there is opportunity for scholars to shift focus from the speaker to the audience, especially since we are living in times where audiences are less and less passive because of platforms that encourage participation in rhetoric, whether online or offline, in the form of repetition, commentary, or thorough discussion. Thus, there is a need to develop a greater appreciation for the cyclical nature of rhetoric and how it is performed and materialized through bodies.

In his discourse, Obama navigates his biracial identity to speak to diverse audiences and reform what it means to be and more importantly, to feel like an American citizen. He reconstructs the American narrative, specifically how race functions within that narrative, which I argue is a performative turn in presidential discourse because it establishes credibility for minority citizens and their distinct American experiences. His rhetoric offers an outline of how presidential rhetoric can be constructed to cater to

pluralistic identities, despite the identity of the speaker. He exemplifies a method for promoting inclusivity in speech by 1) addressing the past and its impact on the present 2) legitimizing *all* experiences, and 3) establishing broad criteria for citizenship. Presidents of diverse nations need to understand how to speak to audiences that consist of multiple viewpoints and experiences; otherwise, they risk speaking only to dominant experiences, which only sustains social hierarchies and inequality. It is not shocking that it took a minority president to invent such a style of speaking, but hopefully, future presidents will emulate his rhetoric. So far, though, the outlook is negative.

On a different note, my study has revealed significant insights to biracial identity as it relates to language, identity, and citizenship. Basically, biraciality comes with experiences that encourage an exploration of historical relationships between various groups and opens up possibilities for new realities. In other words, as a biracial person, I am never truly equipped with a racial comfort zone, which inspires interaction with multiple groups. Given, there are multiracial persons whose bodies are less ambiguous and because of that, their experiences will be different. However, being biracial does come with a lens that produces different visions of what race means, what constitutes a person's identity, and what social perspectives persist, meaning what white people really think about black people and vice versa. Since I am able to occupy homogenous, private spaces because I "belong," and move through intermixed spaces and observe the interactions that happen in both, I am able to experience various aspects of race more intimately.

Such experiences are certainly disadvantageous in some ways; for example, there is a constant sense of alienation because the desire to fit in can be so strong. Division is

much easier to accept if one has a side on which to fight and having a stake in arguments from both sides is emotionally exhausting. To be more specific, in my particular case, when I hear jokes about white people or black people, I am emotionally invested in combatting those prejudices. At the same time, I also know and have seen the truth in many of those same jokes, which makes it hard to defend one side or the other. Plus, being in an interracial family from West Virginia, where racism is rampant and family issues are deeply engrained in backwards beliefs about race, a child learns to grapple with those issues earlier than most. Nonetheless, interracial children are in a rare position to challenge and change preconceived notions of race. It is as psychological as mixed children standing on the auction block, each side of our families see themselves in us, which creates an awe that, even if only for a second, makes race a distant memory.

Although I do argue that Obama is the most visible biracial individual during the time period of this paper, there are other multiracial persons who are speaking from that perspective more explicitly in spaces that are deemed less political, such as the entertainment arena, including singers and rappers like Alicia Keys, Drake, J. Cole, and Jidenna, whose debut album is a complete exploration of his heritage. Athletes like Tiger Woods and Derek Jeter have also spoken openly about their biracial backgrounds. Of course the celebrities listed are not the only mixed-race celebrities, they are simply ones who have been noted to talk about it. Just as Obama's body and discourse shed light on how race functions politically and how his identity shaped how he talks about race and how he approaches his presidency, examining biracial bodies in other spaces like the entertainment and sports spaces can reveal how race performances function there. For

example, the phenomena that light skinned athletes are soft versus dark skinned athletes who are more aggressive (Schilling, 2016).

Interracial communication is fairly new and rightfully so, as the interest in understanding mixed-race bodies is also, but there is still much to explore in this area. Increasing visibility of biracial bodies begs questions like: Where does the biracial body and rhetoric fit in social movements like #BlackLivesMatter? How are hybrid bodies (ab)used throughout history and now? How does multiracial rhetoric invoke elements of “passing?” Do biracial experiences have the rhetorical capacity to inform American perceptions of black and white culture as well as social movements situated around race? It is important, though, that researchers refrain from categorizing biracial bodies because doing so would be unproductive for dismantling race. Instead, interracial studies should, ideally, work to understand the existence of multiracial individuals in the context of racial binaries, not with the result of upholding them, but with the result of understanding how they are broken down.

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analysis of mainstream print media's coverage of Obama's religious
identity. *Journal Of Media & Religion*, 13(3), 138-152.
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antebellum public spaces. *Theatre Survey*, 56(2), 138-165.
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contractual understanding: Exploring biracial women’s communicative
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CURRICULUM VITA

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EDUCATION

Wake Forest University

Anticipated May 2017

M.A., Communication

Focus: Rhetoric

Thesis: "The Magic Mulatto: Barack Obama's Biracial Identity and Negotiation"

Queens University of Charlotte

May 2015

B.A., Communication with highest honors

Focus: Qualitative Research

Thesis: "The Hip-Hop Movement: Hip-Hop Dance and African American Gender"

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Wake Forest University, 2015-2017

AWARDS

2016 Travel Grant, Wake Forest University. \$300

RESEARCH

Publications/ Conferences/Presentations

Academic

Summerville, K. (2016, December). Victims go viral: Digitally dismantling discrimination in America. *From sit-ins to #revolutions: The changing nature of protests*. Book Chapter.

Summerville, K. (2017, January). What the veep?: Cursing, contradictions, and American politicians. A Collection of short essays on contemporary sitcoms. Book Chapter.

Summerville, K. (2017, February). Mapping Obama's biracial body and the politics of 'Passing.' *Carolina Rhetoric Conference: Mapping Boundaries, Tracing Borders*. University of South Carolina. Oral Presentation.

Summerville, K. (2016, May). Visions of black rhetoric and white culture reconsidered: A response to Lucaites and Condit's exploration of <Equality> in Malcolm X's and Martin Luther King Jr.'s rhetoric. A panel discussion with graduate students and faculty entitled *May the Fourth Be With You*. (Panelist)

Professional

Summerville, K. (2016, August). "Client data project: A data analysis of product sales during acquisition period." Presented research study results to sales operation and project management teams.

Summerville, K. (2015, June). "Let's participate in our own rescue: Force Management go green initiative." Presented summer research project to management teams.

To Be Submitted

Summerville, K. (2016, December). Mixing it up: An analysis of Barack Obama and the politics of performance.

Summerville, Karoline. (2015, May). From serious issues to laughing matters: The effects of cynicism and skepticism on attention to and enjoyment of *The Daily Show*. (Independent Research Study).

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Fall 2015 Lab Assistant (Marina Krcmar)

TEACHING

Teaching Assistant

COMM 110: Public Speaking (Dee Oseroff-Varnell)

COMM 113: Relational Communication (Jennifer Priem, Allan Loudon)

Independent Lectures:

Social Media and Identity Negotiation

Natural Hair: A Political or Practical Choice?

CONFERENCES ATTENDED

2016 National Communication Association Annual Convention:
Communication's Civic Callings

Queens University of Charlotte, 2012-2015

AWARDS/HONORS

2015 Most Outstanding Communication Student

2012-2015 Dean's List

2013 Lion's Heart Award (Women's Basketball)

RESEARCH

Presentations/Multimedia Materials

Summerville, K. The hip-hop movement: Hip-hop dance and African American gender. Thesis Presentation. Queens University of Charlotte. May 2015.

Summerville, K. Queens spreads love to Sedgfield. Queens University of Charlotte. News Clip. 2014. Link: <https://vimeo.com/91378164>

Summerville, K. A world without dreams. Queens University of Charlotte. Commercial. 2014. Link: <https://vimeo.com/85741434>

EXTRACURRICULAR UNIVERSITY SERVICE

2012-2015 Women's Basketball

2014-2015 Leaked Ink, Spoken Word Club (Social Media Chair)

2014-2015 Black Student Association

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Spring 2015 Reading Tutor, *A Child's Place*
Spring 2015 Teaching Assistant, *A Child's Place*
Fall 2015 Crew Member, *Trees Charlotte*
Fall 2015 Lead Contact, *YMCA Christmas Party*
Fall 2015 Teacher Assistant, *Sedgefield Elementary*
Fall 2014 Coach, *Upward Basketball*

Salem College, 2011-2012

AWARDS/HONORS

2012 Offensive Player of the Year (Women's Basketball)

PUBLICATIONS

Summerville, K. Tough Love. Incunabula: Salem College Creative Writing Magazine. May 2012. Poem.

EXTRACURRICULAR UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Women's Basketball
Women's Track and Field

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

NBCC FOUNDATION **Winston-Salem, NC** **September**
2016 – Present

Communication Graduate Assistant

- Research and contact potential sponsors for annual symposium
- Produce social media, email, and newsletter content for #GivingTuesday campaign
- Create Google alerts to maintain relationships with scholarship awardees

GrowthPlay **Charlotte, NC** **June 2016 –**
August 2016

Hybrid Intern [Sales Operations/Project Management/Marketing]

- Analyzed company sales trends to inform management business decisions

- Presented findings to Management Directors, Account Managers, and Project Coordinators
- Learned Salesforce capabilities to collect data, and create and analyze sales reports
- Outlined persona profiles for sellers to use in the field to locate ideal clients

GrowthPlay **Charlotte, NC** **June**
2015 – August 2015

Marketing & Project Management Intern

- Produced marketing materials including case studies, blogs, and social media content
- Built project work plans and coordinated with team members for prompt execution
- Connected Managing Partner with 1,500 clients and prospects on LinkedIn to increase sales opportunities
- Completed internal green audit and created a stimulus for action to present to entire team

Time Warner Cable News 14 **Charlotte, NC** **June 2014 –**
August 2014

News Intern

- Outlined project ideas for Education reporter for back-to-school soft and hard news stories
- Used Dalet software program to edit videos, create graphics, and write production stories
- Contacted all local emergency service providers (EMT, Fire, and Police Dept.) for prospective news stories
- Researched press releases and prepared story ideas for daily news meetings

Metamorf, Inc. **Quito, Ecuador** **May**
2014 – June 2014

Travel Journalist Assistant

- Communicated exclusively in Spanish with team to complete projects properly
- Strengthened online presence through social media campaigns and web and blog content
- Translated website content from Spanish to English to reach multiple audiences
- Studied search engine optimization practices to escalate number of website visitors

- Traveled to popular attractions in Ecuador and wrote credible blog articles for clients

Force Management
August 2013

Charlotte, NC

May 2013 –

Marketing Intern

- Compiled blog analytics to outline definition of eye-catching blog content
- Researched LinkedIn optimization techniques to maximize brand promotion
- Studied competitors' website branding strategies to analyze marketing trends