

THE RACE TO PRESIDENCY: TOWARD RACE AND CITIZENSHIP IN “A MORE
PERFECT UNION”

BY

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Communication

May 2017

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

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Abstract

During the 2008 election season, Reverend Jeremiah Wright condemned America to hell before a congregation of Black Americans. These remarks represented a larger tension about race in America. In March of 2008, Obama addressed a crowd of faithful followers at the Philadelphia Constitution Center. In it, he credits his achievements to the wonder and freedom of the American Dream and that, ultimately, racial polarization in America has left the Dream unfinished. “A More Perfect Union” addresses race relations with ease and eloquence, in part because it challenges the idea that America is perfect. Obama invites citizens to think of the Dream as a possibility of perfection, highlighting racial discrimination as evidence that the Dream needs perfection. This thesis focuses on the relationship between perfection and equality in Obama’s framing of the American Dream Myth. I approach Obama’s use of myth and narrative peels back revelations about ideology and race in America. Ultimately, Obama rhetoric unveils the assumptions and biases of Whiteness in American ideology. These assumptions of Whiteness that presuppose the Dream apply to our understanding of citizenship and race in political, social, and other material interactions. This work adds to the primitive and rapidly growing field of race in the rhetorical presidency.

Keywords: Obama, race, rhetorical presidency, American Dream, myth, “A More Perfect Union”

Chapter 1: Citizenship, Race, and the American Dream

Barack Obama's candidacy in the 2008 Presidential election brought a new salience to race within the United States. In communication studies, rhetorical scholars focused largely on impact of Obama's oration on racial rhetoric in Presidential discourse. Much of his success was attributed to the eloquence of his oration, with many equating the form and tenor of his speech to that of leaders of the civil rights movement. One such author would go so far as to liken Obama's prophetic tone to that of the late Martin Luther King Jr (Frank, 2009). Professor David A. Frank recognizes Obama as an extension of the prophetic traditions of African American rhetoric, citing Obama's "A More Perfect Union" "as a descendant of [Martin Luther] King's theology and rhetoric" (2009). The inevitable connection of President Barack Obama to rhetoric of the civil rights era would inspire citizens and scholars alike to enquire the first-time importance of Barack Obama as a candidate for the President of the United States.

In fact, race produced a panic amongst conservative community members throughout Obama's candidacy. Many Americans, both Black and White, viewed his presidency as a practice of Affirmative Action. Others yet viewed his candidacy as an indication of the coming of the anti-Christ. These examples highlight the profound public anxiety expressed by the public throughout his candidacy and presidency. This tension was eventually culminated in threats against Obama's citizenship and his life. The salience of race and the public uproar lead me to question the importance of race to the rhetorical presidency.

In "A More Perfect Union" President Obama regards the unlikely intersection of his ancestries as an unparalleled indicator of the American Dream. "A More Perfect

Union” speaks overtly to race relations in the United States. This matters for a few reasons. First, it is imperative that we explore this intersection from the perspective of the president in order to build a richer understanding of race in the rhetorical presidency. How Obama discussed race ultimately shapes race and the presidency is understood. Second, this speech is the first time Obama directly approaches a fuller discussion of race. Until this point, his campaign rhetoric avoided discussions of race, only participating in superficial dialogue when necessary.

I argue that Obama explored the dimensions of his own identity within a larger American narrative; an understanding centered on rugged individualism, upward mobility, and strategic collectivism. Obama aligns himself with many of the traditional Puritan values, often associated with Midwestern America. He frames his story as an enactment of the American Dream; a complex opportunity to position himself as the best candidate to lead the country. Yet, simultaneously, he rejects the notion that the American Dream Myth is perfect.

The use of myth in presidential rhetoric is deliberative tool that constitutes communities. My research stipulates that Myths serve as tools to express, disseminate, and understand shared ideologies that inform our performance of citizenship. According to Rowland and Jones, “mythic narratives often underlie ideological thinking” which “provides a transcendent purpose for society” that “undergirds the role-defining function served by ideology” (2007). When we interact with myth, we communicate, validate, challenge, deconstruct, and reconstruct the ideologies that support them.

I am interested in Obama’s framing of the American Dream Myth in “A More Perfect Union”. Additionally, I am interested in how this frame is challenged by race.

This first chapter serves as justification for this rhetorical investigation and is divided into four sections. First, I discuss narrative theory through the lenses of Fisher, Rowland, and Jones. Next, I offer a relationship between ideology and public address as a set up for an exploration of citizenship. Finally, I conclude with a description of my critical approach. I describe my use of myth and narrative theory to explore American ideology in the American Dream Myth and how Obama approaches the intersection of race, citizenship

The Myth

Fisher proposes the narrative paradigm. In this paradigm, a narrative is different than a fictional story that addresses whether elements of reality are true. Rather, narratives are stories that are symbolically constructed and have value for those who choose to engage them. The narrative paradigm states that we view the world as a collection of symbol and that we ascribe meaning to symbols using our history, experiences, education, and ideology. This is a process Fisher refers to as good reason. Good reason provides "a warrant for a belief, attitude, or action and the value of a value lies in its relevance, consistency, and consequence" (Fisher, 1978).

Fisher argues that, in the context of the narrative paradigm, "the world is a set of stories" which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation". The human, then, is one who understands the world via a collection of stories, selecting among them based on which seems to ring true and cohere. To MacIntyre, "we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our lives in terms of narratives" (Fisher 1980). Stories are how we interact with members of our

community, build collective and individual identities, and how we establish, endorse, and inhabit our country.

Humans employ good reason when rendering a verdict on how they want to live their lives. Fisher offers five tests that humans employ when interacting with stories, but I focus on three in my thesis. First, humans question consequence, or the potential outcomes of adhering to the recommended attitude. Next is the question of consistency, or the likelihood that values expressed in a story validates one's own existence. Last, the question of transcendence, or an assessment of whether adherence to values will produce a desirable life.

Humans draw from a wealth of knowledge to determine the rationality of a story. Rationality is determined by the nature of the person, their awareness of a narrative's cohesion, and whether they believe a story rings true in their lives. The last two are referred to, respectively, as narrative probability and narrative fidelity. Narrative probability, or a story's cohesiveness, and narrative fidelity, the likelihood that stories rings true, are determined by an individual's rendering of judgement based on good reason. These two features test narratives against what one considers to be true. What matters, then, is not how a story works, but whether or not the story works for that individual.

A specific kind of narrative is a myth. For the purposes of this thesis, I define Myths as fictional, rhetorical narratives that express communal values, help define communal barriers to entry, offer norms of participation for its audience, and motivate participation in a community.

The American Dream Myth celebrates the autonomy of rugged individualism, the prosperity of upward mobility, and the patriotism of a diverse and collective community. The American Dream is a long-standing myth; a symbolic instruction manual of sorts for full participation in the American life. Life within the dream is perfect, an implicit progressivism where people, things, and Democracy are constantly perfected. It situates the citizen as both a participant in and product of a unique space where partaking holds the promise of prosperity for themselves. The American Dream concerns itself with both people and the prosperity they create because their prosperity preserves an open, free, and entrepreneurial society. In this way, the American Dream is chained to the individual and nourished as a collective.

The American Dream myth embodies that progress and is a myth of motion and mobility. The myth lives in possibility and opportunity, sometimes foregoing the circumstances of today to assure that the United States thrives with its citizenry pursue a better tomorrow. If we think of classical liberalism as the instructions, then it can be said that the American Dream is the instruction manual. In the remainder section, I outline the Dream as an expression that informs its audience of ideology.

Citizenship, Ideology, and Persona

An ideology is a network of interconnected convictions that function epistemically, that shapes identity and worldview, and that are revealed through myth and morality (Black, 1970). Ideologies also have a sense of morality, or a measure of what is right or wrong for a given community. Edwin Black argues that examining discourse for morality might reveal how that discourse is catered to an unspoken audience (1970). For example, when Obama refers to “my fellow Americans”, he speaks to an American audience. Specifically, he speaks to an audience that not only demonstrates loyalty to their neighbor, but to those that demonstrate a loyalty to their country. With a simple statement, Obama is able to invoke a sense patriotism and unity that appeals to a specific audience. Thus, a listening for morality in Obama’s “A More Perfect Union” might also reveal specific communities he attempts to persuade.

Ideologies that are revealed in a text serve as heuristics for understanding things beyond the scope of the text itself. Black hypothesizes that if a text speaks to a specific issue that it might influence an audience’s opinion of race in matters that are not directly related to what is explicitly mentioned. For example, if a principal gives a speech on race relations in the classroom, an implied audience might be parents of those children. The language that is used then becomes a frame through which parents might view race relations outside the classroom. These tensions ultimately reveal greater discourses of racialized violence, economic disparities, and inequalities in the community. In the context of presidential rhetoric, presidents use the American Dream Myth to create a heuristic for things beyond the scope of the speech.

In my thesis, I explore the possibilities of citizenship proposed through the Obama's use of American ideology in "A More Perfect Union". Specifically, I look to how Obama capitalizes on American ideology to challenge, reinforce, and renegotiate the citizen as a rhetorical construct. While the first clause of the Fourteenth amendment defines citizenship as "all persons born or naturalized in the United States" (U.S. Const. am. XIV, sec. 1, § 1) and the Declaration of Independence ensures citizenship to all men these legal barriers do not, alone, account for all expectations that accompany citizenship. These unspoken expectations are informed by public discourse, or the "themes, images, and appeals concerning ideal citizenship" that constitute, express, and achieve meaning for citizenship (Murphy, 2003). I view citizenship as a rhetorical construct defined communally and discursively by ideology. For the sake of my work, I define the citizen as one who participates in government affairs, is represented by a State government, and is integrated into a communal culture.

Engaging the ideology of "A More Perfect Union" reveals the audiences Obama implies, how those audiences might view citizenship, and highlight Obama's opportunity to engage citizenship. Mary Stuckey acknowledges that a President plays a unique role in the molding of what it means to be a citizen of the United States (Stuckey, 2004). In her work, she states,

If we accept the premise that citizenship is a rhetorical construct, then, what the president says about specific 'character and civic practices,' which would include 'the recurring themes, images, and appeals concerning ideal citizenship,' should be of paramount importance. The president is the only office elected by all of its

citizens. Symbolically, the president and his accompanying discourse offer the means to understand what constitutes an ideal American identity. (2004)

The use of ideology communicates a mold of citizenship; a standard by which citizens may render a judgement and apply to their own lives. Therefore, a president who commands the language of the American Dream Myth may effectively delineate and define *how* to be a citizen for their intended audience. A president's speech shapes a collective understanding of citizenship as a legal status, a political action, a social performance, and most important to my thesis, a rhetorical construct.

I focus on classical liberalism as the ideology that presupposes the American Dream Myth. The American Dream Myth embodies American classical liberalism, or the ideology that celebrates the puritan values of effort, persistence, "playing the game," initiative, self-reliance, achievement, and success (Fisher, 2003). Classical liberalism is the undergirding ideology that frames how we view and consume the American Dream. Classical liberalism is a commitment, as outlined in the preamble of the United States' Constitution, to "a more perfect union" (Obama, 2008). The founding fathers authored a constitution that implored the necessary devotion to the Nation to continuously perfect themselves as individuals and their country as a whole. Classical liberalism is not to be confused with the liberalism associated with the Democratic party of today. Instead, classical liberalism is separate from ideologies of either conservative or liberal ideologies as supported by the majority parties of our political landscape. Classical liberalism is the foundation informs both the Democratic and Republican parties' ideology, differing in *how* they choose to pursue and produce a perfect union. Classical liberalism informs the thinking that the United States will someday reach its full potential.

Critical Approach

My thesis looks to “A More Perfect Union” to analyze ideological assumptions unnoticed within Obama’s framing of the American Dream Myth. I explore how his simultaneous acceptance and denial of rugged individualism, upward mobility, and collectivism challenge assumption of American ideology. By exploring the Myth, I unpack assumptions of American ideology as they pertain to racial differences in the United States. I look to those ideologies that are challenged, supported, and reinvented when they intersect race.

After uncovering the ideology, I then turn to the audiences these ideologies imply. A close read of “A More Perfect Union” reveals the specific communities Obama attempts to persuade. To do this, I perform two tasks; first I rhetorically analyze Barack Obama’s “A More Perfect Union” seeking out the ways in which the American Dream is framed in his rhetoric. Next, I look to Obama use of narrative. Here, I use Obama’s rhetoric to deduce who he intends to address with his speech by exploring how he caters his stories to “ring true”.

From here I explore two primary relationships in this speech: the relationship between the audience and Obama’s persona and the relationship between the different communities. “A More Perfect Union” acts as a landmark from which I am able to position and explore tensions between the author and his implied audiences. Obama addresses racial tensions both implicitly and explicitly in “A More Perfect Union”. His rhetoric implies the audience and their assumed position on racial tensions.

Chapter Outline

This chapter lays the theoretical ground from which I approach my research interests. In chapter two, I position the American Dream as an expression of American ideology. I then turn to Barack Obama's speech, "A More Perfect Union", to determine the way the American Dream is framed, examining the emphasis Obama placed on rugged individualism, upward mobility, and collectivism. I examine the rhetoric of Obama's speech seeking out specific features of the American Dream that are challenged, reinforced, reinvented, or otherwise ignored. In Chapter 3, I look to the ways in which race complicates the norms of citizenship as prescribed by the context of the Myth. I examine and discuss the ways in which race complicates the ideological foundations of the American Dream. The last chapter will offer concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: An American's Dream

The chapter focuses on the way Obama frames the American Dream in his speech “A More Perfect Union” (Obama, 2008). Obama first uses rugged individualism to critique the assumption that economic prosperity is equally accessible to all. Specifically, he frames an assumption of “opportunity-as-equitable” as a failure of American ideology. Next, Obama advocates for a collectivist attitude. His presentation of collectivism calls for recognition of the difference to heal the prescribed racial divide as a “brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow” (par. 26). Last, Obama distinguishes between the upward mobility of the citizen and that of the Nation. To Obama, the success of a Nation is determined by how the collective cares for each individual.

In this chapter, I explore the American Dream as framed by Barack Obama. I begin with a summary of conditions that preceded the speech. Next, I look to race as a salient topic of public discourse at the time of the speech. I then move to a summarization of research on the American Dream where I define the American Dream as an expression of American ideology and explore the boundaries of the Dream as a container. I then move to a rhetorical analysis of “A More Perfect Union” looking to Obama’s invocation of rugged individualism, upward mobility, and collectivism.

Coddling Controversy

Obama's early success quickly diminished presumptions that Hillary Rodham Clinton would be the Democratic candidate for 2008. In January, Obama would win the Iowa caucus and the South Carolina primary and would later earn the majority of electoral votes on Super Tuesday. Obama gathered a collection of high-profile

endorsements, such as John Lewis, who had formerly back Clinton. Though Hillary would dominate the popular vote, Obama would continue to gain momentum as the primary season continued (Bellantoni, 2008). His momentum would eventually be thwarted by controversy.

On March 8th of 2008 *Good Morning America* aired a segment of Reverend Jeremiah Wright's sermon vehemently scolding the fate of America and its political leadership. In his famous pleas "God Bless America? No! – God *damn* America", Reverend Wright expressed a sentiment that criticized the contemporary political climate and pointed toward tacit racial tensions within American society. He was angry; angry that Americans had forgotten the conditions of Black Americans and angry that the government treated Black Americans as "less than human. Most importantly, the reverend poised then Obama as a complicit actor in the long-told narrative of oppression toward African Americans within the United States. This public comment would soon disseminate to major news channels across the country, including ABC's News report.

Obama took the public stage to respond. On March 14th, Obama posted a blog to the Huffington Post that denounced the words of Reverend Jeremiah Wright. He rejects any statement that "disparages our great country" and claims that words that degrade people have no place in public dialogue. At the surface, he dissociates himself with the allegedly polarizing rhetoric of Reverend Wright. Yet, Obama response reflected a strategic sense of apologia. Obama was a member of his Wright's church which recognized that his affiliation with Reverend Wright poised concerns that he followed a preacher of "hate" (Kenski, Hardy, and Jamieson 2010) Obama knew that his response would determine whether he would be reduced to the stereotype of the "angry Black

man.” Obama addressed Reverend Wright as though he were filled with a unique and uncharacteristic anger. By denouncing Wright’s rhetoric, he not only dissociated himself from the speech, but separated himself from the trope of the angry Black man in order to apologize *on behalf* of the Black community.

Still, his careful words would not be enough to respond. In the period following Obama’s response, the Obama campaign announced that the candidate was preparing a speech on race and politics. The response to follow would later be regarded as Obama’s most profound and effective address of racial tensions to date. Just one short week later, President Barack Obama gave his “A More Perfect Union” address that called for a “rhetoric of *consilience*”, or the binding of particular grievance in the name of the “larger aspirations of all Americans” (Frank, 2009). The tenor of his speech resonated through various channels of public discourse thereafter. With “A More Perfect Union”, Obama demarcated how race would be discussed in the 2008 campaign.

The Challenge of Race

For W.E.B. DuBois, the duality of Black consciousness exists along a color line. DuBois recognized this phenomenon as a double consciousness or the phenomenological experience of pan-African subjects. He states that black individuals experience a separation from themselves and that self-actualization requires a "sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (1868). On one hand, they are Black and subject to the oppressions that many disenfranchised citizens feel in the larger American public. On the other hand, these subjects are appreciative of American liberty and freedom gifted by their former oppressors. For Black Americans, DuBois recognizes that this tension dates back to the emancipation of slaves in 1862 (Vorenberg 2010).

Throughout his speech, Obama references the (seemingly) unique and complex nature of his ancestry. He labels himself as a "son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas" who has felt the privilege of higher education and the wretchedness of living in some of the world's poorest nations. The juxtaposition of these two narratives within his personal experience primes the audience to discuss race as both real and personal. Additionally, the use of personal narrative revealed the complications of being both Black and a citizen. Obama's racial identity is put at tension with his citizenship as a metonymy of racial tensions in American ideology.

I argue that by using personal narratives in "A More Perfect Union", Obama offers a narrative that imply a specific audience. Throughout his speech, he refers to the "Black" and "White" communities as his primary audience both implicitly and explicitly. His use of personal narrative invites both communities to determine whether or not his stories "ring true", or exert narrative fidelity. In this way, Obama juxtaposes White and Black audience members in order to give each audience insight into the experiences of the "other".

The American Dream Myth

The American Dream is a container for the rules of and an expression of American ideology. Calvin Jilson summarizes the American Dream as such,

The American Dream has always been, and continues to be, the gyroscope of American life. It is the Rosetta stone or interpretive key that has helped throughout American history to solve the puzzles of how to balance liberty against equality, individualism against the rule of law, and populism against constitutionalism. The American Dream demands that we constantly balance and

rebalance our creedal values to create and preserve an open, competitive, entrepreneurial society in which the opportunity to succeed is widely available.

Despite the many conflicting strands of the American Creed, the American Dream insists that this must, and must increasingly, be a country in which opportunity is available to all and honest hard work yields the chance to succeed and thrive.

(2004)

The American Dream, therefore, includes an expression of the entrepreneurial spirit and property; an ideology of America as expressed and performed by its citizens.

The American Dream embodies progress as a narrative of motion and mobility, a concept built upon the foundation “perfection” in classical liberalism. The myth lives in possibility and opportunity, often foregoing the circumstances of today to ensure the prosperity and tranquility of its citizens in the future. It is the ideology of commitment dedicated, as outlined in the preamble of the United States’ Constitution, to the pursuit of “A More Perfect Union” (Schudson 2004). This ideology informs the thinking that the United States will someday reach its full potential. Rowland and Jones (2007) describes the relationship between ideology and myth as complimentary rhetorical forms.

The ideological myth is, in part, a function of power to mediate. The myth itself is a powerful tool within American democracy that consolidates power by eliminating the competing narratives. In other words, the myth that the American Dream has and continues to be *the* ideological framework for the United States effectively erases the ebbs and flows of the pursuit of liberation and equality into one single storyline. If the American Dream is an expression of ideology, then it would serve to understand that the controller of the Dream frames and defines the meaning of the Myth for their audience.

In Obama's vocabulary, he would define the American Dream myth as an imperfect scene that, by the work of its citizens, progresses toward perfection. For Obama, the American Dream is not yet complete until all Americans are granted equality in rights and conditions. The Dream is limited by the inequities of Black and other marginalized communities in the United States. On one side, this limit is held up by those in power. On the other side, the boundaries are carried like a burden by those excluded. The potential for perfection, therefore, is in destroying the limits that are placed on the Dream. Ultimately, Obama's vision of progress is a nationwide commitment to eradicating those ideas, systems, and institutions that limit Black Americans.

When Obama speaks to a "more perfect Union", he situates the citizen as both a participant in and product of a unique space where perfection is an action of the Citizen. The American Dream concerns itself with people and the prosperity they create, wherein prosperity preserves an open, free, and entrepreneurial society. Perfection is an implicit sense of progressivism where people, things, and Democracy are constantly sanctified. Within the Dream, citizenship is also synonymous with perfection-as-verb., or the act of pursuing a standard of purity that defined conventionally by a community. Therefore, as communities evolve, so do might their standards of purity. In this sense, perfection is a verb, or an act that requires movements and constant change.

Presidents and Stories

Throughout his speech, Obama references the (seemingly) unique and complex nature of his ancestry. He labels himself as an embodiment of the American Dream, as one who has felt the privilege of higher education and the wretchedness of living in some of the world's poorest nations (par. 6). The juxtaposition of the White and Black roots of

his racial heritage of his personal experience then prime the audience to discuss race as both real and personal. He states,

This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign – to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together – unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction – towards a better future for of children and our grandchildren. This belief comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people. But it also comes from my own American story (Obama 2008)

A closer read of the President’s speech recognizes Barack Obama as a metonymy for several identities within the American electorate (Terrill, 2009). His experience is representative of what all Americans should aspire to.

I use a rhetorical analysis of “A More Perfect Union” to unpack the qualities, nuances, and boundaries of the ideal citizen that Obama unveils within the context of the “American Dream.” Investigating the relationship between citizenship and presidential rhetoric might grant insight into how citizenship is defined in social and political spheres; how (each president plays an instrumental role in the shaping of our national definitions (Stuckey, 2008; Zarefsky 2004). As presidents shift the scene of the American Dream,

they also shift what it means to participate in that Dream. In this way, the reimagining of citizenship becomes a consequence of presidential framing.

Rugged Individualism

One symbol of the American Dream is rugged individualism as revealed in the concept of the “self-made man.” Kinder and Sears state that Americans view individualism as a traditional American value. Particularly, White Americans insist “that people should be rewarded on their merits, which in turn should be based on hard work and diligent service” (1981). This narrative presumes that those wealthiest and affluent individuals are those who “made it” off of sheer wit and skill. Here, the entrepreneurial spirit is likened to the cowboy of the new frontier, conquering new territory with natural wisdom and chosen resilience (Fisher 1987; Patton 2006). The self-made man, therefore, is the epitome of the American Dream.

Yet, individualism has not always guaranteed citizenship for Americans. Obama begins his speech by acknowledging that the principles of equality intended by the founding fathers was not accessible to Black Americans. The Declaration of Independence sponsors the idea of human rights; that those represented by the document were endowed with unalienable rights that include the right to property as self-actualization. And yet, “words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States.” (par.4). Therefore, the definition of citizenship would evolve to include women and men of every creed and color.

Obama states that the treatment of Black Americans throughout history echoes in race relations today. The lack of basic services like “parks for kids to play in, police

walking the beat, regular garbage pickup, building code enforcement” collectively hinder the success of an individual (par. 29). He marks many of the blockades of Black Americans as a part of a long legacy of discrimination in the United States. He states,

A lack of economic opportunity among black men, and the shame and frustration that came from not being able to provide for one's family contributed to the erosion of black families — a problem that welfare policies for many years may have worsened. And the lack of basic services in so many urban black neighborhoods... (par. 29)

For many Black Americans, the sting of slavery and Jim Crow would fuel frustration of current affairs. Even those individuals who overcome hindrance and actualize wealth and autonomy are subject to resonate frustrations of a damning past. Obama continues to say,

What's remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but how many men, and women overcame the odds; how many were able to make a way out of no way, for those like me who would come after them. For all those who scratched and clawed their way to get a piece of the American Dream, there were many who didn't make it — those who were ultimately defeated, in one way or another, by discrimination. (par. 30-31)

Black Americans are not satisfied with having succeeded in contemporary times because of increased equality but *in spite* of it. They recognize that they made it despite the lack of equality in opportunity; that discrimination is the central difference who gets to experience equality and who does not.

Obama criticizes the frustrations of White Americans as incoherent with the American Dream. To the White American, equality is accessible to all because the Constitution “leveled” the playing field for all Americans to the White community, “their experience is the immigrant experience” and “as far as they’re concerned, no one handed them anything” (par. 33). Obama acknowledges the frustration of White Americans as valid and rooted in the failed economic promise of the Dream, so that when White Americans see an “African-American is getting an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college because of an injustice that they themselves never committed; when they’re told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudiced, resentment builds over time” (par. 33).

The climax of racial tension in his speech comes when he calls upon the White community to do more than assuming the Black community fails to reach the model standard of rugged individualism. As Obama states, “[for] the white community, the path to a more perfect union means acknowledging that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people; that the legacy of discrimination — and current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past — are real and must be addressed.” (par. 40). He invites the White community to view the experience of the Black community as more than mere fiction; to Obama it is imperative that White Americans divorce the concept of individualism from citizenship.

Obama positions these two narratives as oppositional to highlight the differing assumptions of equality that fuel racial disparities in the United States. On the one hand, the Black community acknowledges the assumption that an equality of opportunity is accessible for all Americans is false. On the other hand, the White community assumes

that an equality of opportunity is accessible to all and that anyone who question the myth's Truth deserves antipathy. His goal is not to reinforce the assumption that equality in the United States is accessible to all. Rather, he focuses on the flawed reasoning of the Dream to both unveil the narrative of rugged individual and challenge its role in the perfection of the Union. Ultimately, Obama's challenges the assumption that individualism is a prerequisite for citizenship in the United States. Instead, he categorizes this assumption as a barrier for Black citizen's access to citizenship. Additionally, he marks this assumption as an unnecessary measure that brings frustration to the White community.

Obama calls for a more inclusive rendering of citizenship within the American Dream. He does this in two ways; first, by arguing that individualism has been a tool for marginalizing Black citizens in the United States. Second, he puts forth the idea that all citizens should be treated equally in condition and opportunity. The rhetoric of "A More Perfect Union" challenges the notion that individualism is a necessary prerequisite for citizenship. Obama invites his audience to see that the Declaration of Independence assumes that all citizens are guaranteed equality in the American Dream and that citizenship is earned through one's individual merit. Then, in a swift rebuttal, he challenges the audience to acknowledge how a current understanding that individualism (as a form of performed autonomy) has been used to discriminate against Black Americans. According to Obama, the Constitution was written in the spirit of equality, but that individualism and racial discrimination have continued to play a role in who excluded and included in citizenship. To Obama, a historical perspective on the United

States would remind us that individualism did not always ensure equality for all and inspire us to be more inclusive.

The stories we tell about rugged individualism shape how we view citizenship in our material lives. For example, our stories about individualism influence how we determine who is a good citizen and who is not. Specifically, White communities believe that Blacks violate traditional American values like individualism and self-reliance (Kinder and Sears 1981). In narrative terms, White communities apply the question of consequence to the stories of Black Americans. If Black Americans are able to be self-reliant, then White Americans will view them as full citizens. If not, White Americans uphold their biases against Black Americans.

Obama regards this logic as a flaw of the American Dream. He argues that focusing on a specific *performance* of citizenship detracts from the reality of discrimination. Instead of applying a test of consequence to Black Americans in reference to the Dream, Americans should recognize that discrimination should ring true for all Americans. He poises discrimination and perfection of complimentary tropes; that ending discrimination might birth perfection and that through perfection we might end discrimination.

This was an important turn in Obama's speech in this political climate. Obama rejects the notion brought forth by Reverend Jeremiah Wright that America should be "dammed." He offers, instead, the belief that America could be perfected.

Collectivism

Obama carefully regards the different experiences of African American and white Americans as distinct yet interconnected. He turns to the story of Ashley Baia who served as a local organizer for the Obama administration during the 2008 election. She grew up with a mother with a daunting illness leaving Ashley to serve as the young matriarch of her family. The cost of her mother's health would not only be quantified in the amount of health care debt accumulated, but by the impact, it left to Ashley. Baia would grow up to advocate for universal healthcare. One day during a community meeting, Baia interviews the volunteers as to their purpose to joining the coalition (par. 52-55). A black man turns to her and responds "I am here because of Ashley." (par. 58). With this story, Obama frames America's problems as "neither black [n]or white or Latino or Asian," but problems that face all Americans. Obama does this to validate the many difficulties faced by Americans.

To Obama, the state of the union relies upon the collaboration of its citizens. The story of his upbringing highlights the plurality of America and its identity. His heritage marries the experiences of a "White woman from Kansas" and a "black man from Kenya" to produce his unique story (par. 7). Out of the many possibilities of American heritage, one story was born. He then immediately moves into the plurality of the American story and builds upon the Latin phrase "E Pluribus Unum" to highlight the remarkable capabilities of a country committed to a plurality of perspective. Out of many, America is one nation beset with the greatness of its people. It is from this plurality that Obama stakes the claim that the Union's fate is dependent upon the collaboration of its citizens. He uses South Carolina as the exemplary example of collaboration. There, he

“built a powerful coalition of African American and white Americans” despite the prominence of the “Confederate flag” a common symbol of racial tension in the South. This example not only demonstrates the possibility of partnership despite difference, but the necessity of working together to perfect the Union.

Obama proposes a collectivist attitude as a solution to racial tensions and economic instability in the United States. Obama pleads, ultimately, that the Nation “is more than the sum of its parts”; he pleads the public to view their individual liberation as bound to the liberation of one’s neighbor. Posing collectivism as a practical solution allowed Obama to turn the focus of American peril “outward.” The condition of America is not the result of the conduct of people with different histories, but the American corporation is shipping domestic jobs overseas. Obama states, “from the real culprits of the middle class squeeze — a corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices and short-term greed; a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many” (par. 35). The citizen, then, was one who collaborated with their neighbor regardless of race or creed to better the future of America.

This shift takes one step away from the rugged individualism of traditional American ideology proposes a collectivist public memory as a tool to build a nationwide coalition toward liberty. Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s comment, however salient, was nothing more than a symbol of racial tensions in the United States. Wright’s comments were a reflection of deepening divides in the American community. Polarization occurred along the lines of gender, race, and political party. In his use of collectivism, Obama builds upon the notion of perfection to argue for a depolarization racial communities.

Collectivism and Upward Mobility

Obama frames America as an imperfect Union where improvement is always available – for the individual and the Union. “We the People, in order to form a more perfect union” he notes as the preamble to a Constitution that would birth a Nation inherently designed to be perfected over time (par 1-3). Obama offers his personal narrative of upward mobility. For him, the ability to attend the best schools in the nation despite having lived in the poorest countries in the world demonstrates the fertility of the American Dream (par. 7). His candidacy is a continuation of “a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America” (par. 5). The pursuit of “more” in this context is a movement, or an action of, perfecting the United States. Here, Obama marries the pursuit of “perfection” as a performance of the citizen.

Obama offers the collective pursuit of economic prosperity as a solution to economic disparities between Black and White citizens. Wealth and property ownership are central components of the American Dream. The Dream centers itself on material assessments of wealth as created by and through a capitalistic market (Fisher 1973). In order to ensure a more perfect union, citizens should act in good deeds by

...investing in our schools and our communities; by enforcing our civil rights laws and ensuring fairness in our criminal justice system; by providing this generation with ladders of opportunity that were unavailable for previous generations. It requires all Americans to realize that your dreams do not have to come at the expense of my dreams; that investing in the health, welfare and education of black and brown and white children will ultimately help all of

America prosper...Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well. (Obama 2008)

Upward mobility of a Nation is the result of citizens working together to ensure that each individual has the access to the resources that nurture the equality that the Nation's designers intended. In this way, the American Dream is chained to the individual and nourished as a collective. Creating equal access to economic opportunity is how a Nation builds and perfects "a Constitution that promised [that] its people liberty and justice."

Generating wealth is how we care for fellow citizens and how we move the country forward. In this frame, the individual is always capable of "more" and, as the individual works toward perfection, the Nation follows suit. He addresses the public with a hopeful tone as he states, "But I have asserted a firm conviction — a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people — that, working together, we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union" (par. 36). The American Dream becomes a moral myth that offers standards of how to coexist with Americans to ensure that America moves past the "a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years" (par. 36). In this context, the true American is the person who acts compassionately toward their fellow citizens. This participant is tolerant, charitable, compassionate, and acknowledges the dignity and worth of fellow Americans.

The richness of Obama stems from his response to the conditions of the time and his proposals for a new, more perfect Union. The next chapter will explore the significance of the Dream Obama proposes in his speech, "A More Perfect Union" in the greater context of race relations in the United States. In my final chapter, I look to

Obama's framing of the larger historical context of citizenship for Black individuals as a method to challenge the assumption that equality presupposes citizenship

Chapter 3: A More Equal Union

In Chapter two, I followed Obama's framing of the American Dream Myth in his speech "A More Perfect Union" paying specific attention to how he defines the boundaries of citizenship. Throughout the speech, he frames the American Dream Myth as an expression of an ideology. He focuses on rugged individualism as a central tenant of the Dream, but posits that current understanding of citizenship in relation to individualism is incongruent with the spirit of the Declaration of independence. Obama sought to validate the frustrations of millions of Black and White Americans across the Nation. This speech also offered a collectivist approach to wealth accumulation as a means of overcoming the racial divides created through discrimination. In sum, the American Dream Myth was a rhetorical space through which required equality to achieve perfection.

Obama frames the Union as a scene of equality, unity, mobility, and perfection. In his frame of the American Dream Myth, Obama acknowledges that discriminatory practices have excluded Black American from certain features of the myth. This form of symbolic bias and exclusion can be understood through a theory of racial resentment (Kinder and Sears, 1981). This body of research identifies the ways in which White Americans actively associate individualism with citizenship in order to marginalize Black Americans. By insisting that individualism is a prerequisite for citizenship, White Americans are able to symbolically challenge the legitimacy of Black citizenship.

On a broader scale, "A More Perfect Union" reflects and responds to greater narratives of race in the United States. This chapter explores race and resentment in the context of American Public discourse. Obama's framing of the myth both accepts and

rejects tensions within the Myth and, in doing so, reflect tensions in the greater American public.

Race, Citizenship, and “A More Perfect Union”

Throughout “A More Perfect Union” Obama apologizes on behalf of Black community. He accepts that his relationship with Reverend Wright will inevitably connect him to the anger of the Black community. He airs their grievances and takes it one step further – he *explains* them. He addresses racial inequalities in the workplace, in residential communities, and in education in order to justify the rage of Black Americans. In one way, his racial identity validates these experiences. When he speaks to the subject of discrimination, the audience views him as a credible storyteller of the Black experience. Obama also uses this “first-person” telling of the Black experience to argue that, for many, the merit of their own efforts has been blocked by a legacy of discrimination. Obama makes the claim, then, that individualism is not enough to ensure citizenship as a direct challenge to the racial resentment of White Americans.

Obama posits that racial inequality have been present in American public discourse since the founding of the Nation. Obama argues that the discrimination faced today is but a legacy of the traditions of discrimination throughout history. The Declaration of Independence inscribed the belief that “all men were created equal” and “endowed with unalienable right,” yet slavery would prove that these rights were selected on the basis of race. Race has been an exclusionary measure for citizenship since the founding of the United States Black individuals, with very few exceptions, were automatically characterized as property over not citizens. Obama acknowledges slavery and racial discrimination as a great stain on the American Dream that need be removed.

He also tells the story of discrimination from the perspective of survivor's remorse. He argues that discrimination and inequality in the United States is the main culprit in prohibiting the perfection of the American Dream Myth. In this way, he accepts the imperfection of the Dream. At the same time, he tells the story of the Black experience on behalf of those who made it "out" of the poor, Black experience.

In the American Dream Myth, he notes that freedom becomes possible when each individual pulls themselves up. However, not all people have access to the same opportunity to "pull themselves up by the bootstraps". He encourages a devotion to equality in the Dream. Additionally, he alludes to Civil Rights and other movements of perfection to signify the potential of the dream when perfection is pursued. In this way, Obama offers his own personal experience as evidence of what is possible within the American Dream. In the end, Obama accepts the notion that true freedom and equality are possible in the Dream while simultaneously rejecting the idea that perfection has been obtained. His story justifies a need and encourages a trust for the perfection of the Union.

Missing the Mark

Obama argues that the Union will be perfected once unity and collaboration is achieved (see *Collectivism and Upward Mobility* in chapter 2). He strategically co-aligns the well-being of the collective to the well-being of the individual to avoid offering a practical solution to racial inequality. For example, Obama uses healthcare and education as two examples of how we can nurture one another in our communities. However, he does not connect these policies to the discriminations he mentions earlier (and throughout) his speech.

Obama was not without critics in the Black community. Cornell West and Travis Smiley argued Obama does not care about race. To these Black commentators, Obama's use of myth throughout his campaign framed progress in a way that would reduce the chance of a desirable life. Princeton professor Cornel West chastised Obama for his inability to address White supremacy in the United States. West refers to Obama as a "n****rized" president who prioritizes political gain over the advancement of the Black community. To West, White supremacy is "as American as apple pie". Travis Smiley, radio co-host and colleague of West, also criticized Obama's softness on White supremacy. Together the two would argue that his narrative did not reach a satisfactory level of transcendence. If a president is to lead a country, then he must also address its inherent issues, a task Obama fails to do in his presidency. Hope and progress can only be achieved through a deliberate struggle for improvement West, (West 2008). Obama's inability to address White Supremacy, is then a betrayal of progress

Citizens as Neighbor

In "A More Perfect Union", Obama states that he knows audience members relies on American ideology as a heuristic to fill in the enthymematic breaks in the American Dream. When he states, "Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience — as far as they're concerned, no one handed them anything", Obama acknowledges that the White community assumes that individualism must be followed by, or is *probably* followed by, citizenship within the Dream. To Obama, Whites view the inequities of the Black population as a probable result of a failure to adhere to rugged individualism. In other words, the suffering of the Black community is due, in part, to a

failure to act and operate within the moral (and material) compass of rugged individualism.

To argue for a solution, Obama challenges the narrative fidelity of the American Dream by introducing the narrative of racial discrimination. Obama claims that the relationship the White community draws between individualism and citizenship is insufficient to discredit the contemporary inequalities. He reminds the White community that discrimination rings true for many Black American and that, ultimately, discrimination is a real and pertinent issue to *all* Americans. In this way, he makes the claim that discrimination is not in line with the spirit of the American Dream (narrative fidelity) and that a perfect Union cannot be achieved so long as discrimination is real.

Obama's invocation of the audience's good reason, their inherent sense that discrimination is abhorrent to the Dream, is evidence for a nationwide commitment to equality. He recognizes that much of the population believes that if they "follow the rules" of individualism, their life should be fine. Yet, Obama challenges the logic by highlighting the influence of racial discrimination on the Black community and reminds us to remain diligent to the cause of eradicating discrimination. A historical view of the United States, in Obama's terms, should lead the American public to believe that all men are equal. It should also follow that the existence of discrimination and inequality does not align with the fidelity of the American Dream.

This break in narrative fidelity invites audiences to reconsider how they use race define citizenship within the American Dream. First, Obama challenges the idea of *who* gets to be a citizen in the United States. He "calls out" the biased standards of the White community for placing strict limits on their interpretation of the Dream, thus postponing

the Black community' actualization of the Dream. Instead of directly condemning them, he offers the idea that citizenship should invest in the livelihood of their neighbor. Therefore, citizenship is not only how we take care of a nation, but how we take care of one another.

A Birth of Resentment: The Individual as Citizen

Not everyone agreed with Obama's argument that eradicating discrimination and inequality would ensure perfection of the Dream. One such group, the birthers, challenged Obama's framing on a slightly different front – his own citizenship. In the eyes of the birthers, a story of citizenship did not require change because the Constitution provided rigid guidelines. Obama's plea to change the story of citizenship incongruent with how they thought citizenship *should* be. The birther movement viewed Obama as incoherent with their story of what it means to be citizen and thus displayed a material resentment.

Obama personal narrative positioned himself as an ordinary actor in the American Dream that largely challenged the dominance of individualism in the rhetorical construction of citizenship. The birthers, however, expressed their anxiety through a structured plea for Barack Obama to publically disclose his official birth certificate. Donald Trump, prominent business leader and television personality, would endorse the birther movement during an interview on *The View* adding to the growing mass. During the heated exchange with host Whoopi Goldberg, Donald Trump questioned why Obama would not release his birth certificate and that he wished “[Obama] would because...it's a terrible pall that's hanging over him ... There's something on that birth certificate that he doesn't like” (Cheney and Gass, 2016). Donald Trump would continue to serve as a

spokesperson for the birther movement over the next six months (Eder 2016). The movement gained momentum, eventually becoming one of the salient dissenting groups of Senator Obama's campaign and later administration.

To the birthers, citizens were those who were born naturally in the United States, who worked hard, and who earned their living. Citizens were also honest and transparent. Though unsuccessful in their efforts to prevent his election, my conjecture is that the birther movement was a reflection of a rising racial resentment in the United States. Racial resentment is a symbolic form of racism that “represents a form of resistance to change in the racial status quo based on moral feelings that blacks violate such traditional American values as individualism and self-reliance, the work ethic, obedience, and discipline.” (Kinder and Sears, 1981)

Before Obama, no presidential candidate was held to the same scrutiny to provide evidence for their citizenship. Obama revokes the idea that individualism is accessible to all. Instead, he challenges the idea that the American Dream prioritizes individualism in a way that is harmful to Black Americans. In doing so, he challenges the assumptions that individualism should be prioritized at all. Though impossible to demonstrate in the scope of my work, the timing of the birther's popularity in response to Obama's challenge of individualism in the American Dream is curious. My conjecture is to extend Kinder and Sears' hypothesis to say that Whites also express racial resentment when the rhetorical construction of individualism is challenged in public narrative. Thus, we see the relationship between individualism and citizenship reinforced by the dissenting narrative of the birther movement.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Toward Perfection

Obama's uses the "truths" of the Dream as a starting point to challenge sacred tenants of American Dream, focusing specifically on rugged individualism, collectivism, and upward mobility. Race, color, and creed are salient measures of one's experience in the United States, and by Obama's frame, should be a magnifying glass to the experiences of those Americans unlike ourselves. Instead of focusing on differences as negative, these differing experiences are to be seen as strengths of America as a Nation – the strength to build coalitions dedicated to the perfection of the Union.

In his speech, "A More Perfect Union", Obama frames the American Dream Myth as scene of opportunity and perfection. For him, rugged individualism, collectivist attitudes, and upward mobility are all hallmarks to the prosperity and perfection of the United States. A long history of racial discrimination, however, would impede upon the actualization of citizenship for Black Americans within the United States. Therefore, the country should take up the daunting task of ensuring all Americans, regardless of color, are granted equal conditions *as well as* equal opportunity. He divorces the concept of individualism from the American Dream myth, stating that it is an illusion that continues to polarize White and Black community members

In sum, Obama invoked American ideology and engage what it means to be a citizen of the United States. In my thesis, I explore the possibilities of citizenship proposed through the Obama's framing of the American Dream Myth in "A More Perfect Union." I look to Obama's approach to citizenship is overt and uniquely interconnected

with race. Ultimately, I argue that Obama uses the American Dream myth to communicate the angst of the Black community, to apologize on behalf of perceived rage, and to offer up collaboration as a solution to racial tensions in the United States.

The Victor's Spoils

The rhetoric of Obama's campaign becomes important to scholars of the rhetorical presidency for several reasons, but I begin with the obvious, yet unspoken reality: he won. Obama's victory following the 2008 election (and subsequent 2012 victory) illustrates the effectiveness of racial rhetoric. It becomes even more crucial to our understanding of Obama when we consider the fact that he was elected the first Black president of the United States just fifty short years after Martin Luther King's "I Had a Dream speech". Not only did he win, but he dominated by large margins. He won 95 percent of the Black vote, 66 percent of the under-30 vote, and 66 percent of the Latino vote, losing only in White votes (40 percent). He won unexpected states in the northeast, the south, and the Midwest indicating that his candidacy could appeal to Americans everywhere (Terrill 2009).

For communication this becomes essential because a historical view of the presidency displays that the victor writes history. The hope of Obama being elected as the first Black president is that he will not be the last. His primitive use of race in the rhetoric of his presidency will be the example from which we compare future presidents of different races, and possibly genders. In the same way we might discuss Reagan as the cornerstone of neo-conservatism in the United States, we may come to regard Obama as a game-changer for race in the rhetorical presidency in no small part due to his ability to fashion understandings through his rhetoric. Additionally, his use of race will inform our

understanding of race and politics in a broader scheme. I further this point later in the chapter.

Race

“A More Perfect Union” was pivotal to the 2008 election year as it set the tone for how race was to be discussed and negotiated during a period of political polarization and distrust. Obama constructs a narrative of American exceptionalism that validates both African and European American narratives of citizenry. By use of narrative, he provided a space for safe and effective self-reflection for all Americans to work through a shared history of trauma and triumph. His use of personal narrative also served as a powerful tool in understanding the differences between these two dominant narratives.

Additionally, Obama made discussions of race relations in the United States palatable. He uses personal narratives to reduce the fear – of polarization, of violence, racism, etc. -- associated with discussing race. He allowed access into his life as a Black man, while providing t into the Black experience through his storytelling. Because of his welcoming nature and the effectiveness to which it appealed to his audiences, Obama was also able to establish a language through which Americans could discuss race. He gave Americans permission to refer to each other as “Black”, “White”, and “American” to highlight the similarities and differences of culture.

Obama’s speech reminds us that symbolic discussion of race are connected to and influence material systems of oppression. Symbolic racism perpetuates the material system of racism that oppresses Black citizens. Ideologies that are communicated through speech prime the audience to interpret the real world through the perspective of the

speaker. That is to say that an audience member applies the ideology of a text as a heuristic; this does not guarantee acceptance or denial, but rather linguistic tools to understand the world. Therefore, how we talk about race influences how we interact, discuss, perform, and otherwise live as citizens.

When we discuss race, we implicitly point to who is included and excluded in the American Dream. My assessment of the birther movement displays one of many cases where rhetoric perpetuates systems of bias against “second-class” citizens. This case helps decode how race reveals who is included and excluded in the rhetorical citizens, and thus our material lives. The boundaries we use to exclude and include people reflect power dynamics in the United States. Even the leader of the free world was subject to having his citizenship delegitimized.

Citizenship

Individualism also helps us understand who’s included and excluded in the symbolic construction of citizenship. American ideology positions the individual as separate and free from the government in power. According to this logic, the governed are subject to the rule of the state, but celebrate their right to privacy and freedom from government intervention. Debates on individualism and privacy are echoed, for example, in debates on second amendment and abortion rights. In these two debates, the government is the enemy of the individual. Therefore, anyone who is dependent upon the state is seen as “less-than” one who is independent of the state.

Obama addresses the White community’s perception of the Black citizen’s dependence on the state. In doing so, he challenges the state-citizen relationship in

American ideology. He states that Black dependency on the state is the result of economic turmoil caused by centuries of discrimination. Therefore, the Black citizens' dependency on the State (or at the very least, the perception of White citizens that Black individuals are overly dependent) is both inaccurate and damaging to the benefit of Black Americans. He accepts the idea that black citizens are more dependent on the state, but rejects the idea that it is their fault. Additionally, he accepts the notion that the individual should be free from intrusion of the state, but negates the idea that this should be true for all Americans. It is not until all Americans are equal that we can render equal judgements on all.

Obama challenges us to conceive individualism, instead, as a way to police the inclusion of certain racial subjects into different communities. I argue that Obama reconfigures the assurance that individualism produces thus shifting the rhetorical construction of citizenship. Obama points out the ways in which we use one's rugged individualism to measure their citizenship in the United States. He does so by first acknowledging the need of the Union to be perfected, likening perfection to the inclusion of Black citizens into the American Dream. Next, he points to the idea that equality is a necessary condition for legal citizenship, but not for full actualization of the American Dream. Obama then reconfigures the "equation" for citizenship; he begins this by challenging the assumption that rugged individualism is a necessary prerequisite for citizenship. Instead, he offers a nuanced understanding of equality of condition as the intended and necessary precursor to citizenship in the American Dream.

In Closing

Obama challenges everything we take for granted about race in the rhetorical presidency. Mary Stuckey poses a series of questions for scholars of presidential rhetoric:” What does it mean that certain citizens are sometimes props for presidential speech, sometimes even the subject of it, but are rarely the actual audience for it? (2010). In her same work, she posits that scholars of the field have taken for granted the gender and racial assumptions of a rhetorical presidency. Until now, we have had little reason to explore the pattern of white, heteronormative, males in the office of the presidency. The candidacy and subsequent election of Barack Obama offers a rich platform to explore the meaning of race in American public discourse. It is to this fertile area of research that I offer my research.

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Investigation of the Relationship between Gender,
Identity and the LGBT Counterpublic.*
Faculty Advisor: Becky Mulvaney, PhD
GPA: 3.7

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

January 2017 – August 2017

Wake Forest University, Athletic Department

Tutor

Winston Salem, NC

Constructed weekly study sessions for a total of 10
students spanning six courses. Collaborated with
students to cater to individual educational needs.
Facilitated group discussion and application of
theory to current events.

June 2016 - July 2017
Transatlantic Fellowship

Department of State, Benjamin Franklin

Dorm Director/Mentor

Winston Salem, NC

Enforced dorm and travel policies for a collective of 60 international and domestic students. Conducted seminars in rhetoric, law, and persuasion. Led a group of six mentors in enforcement of camp policies.

January 2016 - May 2017
Communication

Wake Forest University, Department of

Teaching Assistant, Public Speaking /Relational Communication

Winston Salem, NC

Facilitated weekly lab lectures. Developed course syllabi for each semester. Administered and graded examinations. Improved grading systems for future teaching assistants.

May 2014- December 2015
Volleyball

Florida Atlantic University, Varsity Women's

Co-Captain

Boca Raton, FL

Led a Division I volleyball team. Facilitated small group meetings. Served as community representative for the university. Consulted coach for team building and wellness exercises.

EXTRACURRICULAR and VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

October 2016 – January 2017

Queer Defiance

Student Activist/Community Organizer

Winston Salem, NC

Coordinated organized press releases to Wake Forest officials. Organized and attended protests throughout Winston Salem community.

Corresponded with officials at various levels of government regarding salient legal matters.

January 2017-March 2017

Vigilante Truth,

Public Relations and Marketing Committee –

Documentary Project

Winston Salem, NC

Organized fundraising event. Authored press releases for public awareness of the documentary. Persuaded members of the local community to donate thousands of dollars in goods and services to fundraising efforts.

August 2016- November 2016

Democratic Party of Forsyth County

Voter Registration Volunteer

Winston Salem, NC

Enlisted members of the community to update voter registration status. Educated community members on North Carolina voting legislation.

August 2016-May 2017
University

Graduate Student Association, Wake Forest

Social Chair

Facilitated social events for the Reynolda campus at Wake Forest University. Led committee members to organize events that fostered networking and community across various disciplines.

PUBLICATIONS and PRESENTATIONS

St Sume, Jennifer. *Shameless Apparel*, in *Critical Media Studies: Student Essays on Contemporary Sitcoms*. Mary M. Dalton, Ed., (Wake Forest University Press.). Pending Publication

Pabst, Kevin (Director), & Smith, Emily (Director of Photography), & St Sume, Jennifer (Producer). (2016). *To Speak on Canvas [Documentary]*. (Available from Wake Forest University Pictures, 1834 Wake Forest Road, Winston Salem, NC 27106)

Jennifer St Sume, "L" is for Licentious: A Literature Review on Identity, Rhetoric, and the LGBTQ Counterpublic, presentation at Southern States Communication Association. (April 11, 2015)

Jennifer St Sume, "L" is for Licentious: A Literature Review on Identity, Rhetoric, and the LGBTQ Counterpublic, presentation at Florida Atlantic University's Research Symposium. (April 3, 2015)
Honor: Oral Presentation Award, Second Place.