A Change We Can Believe In?
Barack Obama and Black Politics

Edda Arnaldsdóttir

Lokaverkefni til BA-gráðu í stjórnmálafræði

Félagsvísindasvið

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Útdráttur

Í þessari ritgerð er eftirfarandi spurningu varpað fram: Hvernig fór meðlimur minnihlutahóps að því að verða forseti Bandaríkjanna? Til að reyna að svara þessari spurningu er farið stuttlega yfir sögu svartra í Bandaríkjunum og aðstæður þeirra frekar skoðaðar með hjálp kenninga á borð við "Black Utility Heuristic" eftir Michael Dawson, "Politics of Presence" eftir Ann Phillips, "Race Relations Cycle", "Citizenship-Development Cycle" og "Critical Actors" kenninguna eftir Sarah Childs og Mona Krooks. Farið er yfir kosningabaráttu Obama og hvernig henni var háttað, þá sérstaklega þær hindranir sem hann kann að hafa orðið að yfirstíga vegna kynþáttar síns.

Niðurstöðurnar eru þær að Obama er ekki bara forseti svarta fólksins heldur reynir hann að vera forseti allra Bandaríkjamanna. Þó svo að hann hafi forðast að beina kastljósinu að kynþætti sínum breytir það því ekki að hans sigur í kosningunum er stórt skref í átt að frekara jafnrétti fyrir svarta í Bandaríkjunum. Obama virðist vera hluti af nýrri kynslóð af svörtum stjórnmálamönnum sem búa við aðrar aðstæður en svartir stjórnmálamenn sem ólust upp nokkrum áratugum fyrr. Þessar breyttu aðstæður eru stór hluti af leyndarmálinu á bak við velgengni Obama.

Abstract

This thesis examines how a member of a minority group was able to become the president of the United States. When Barack Obama was elected president he made history by becoming the first Black president of the United States. This thesis goes over a short history of Black people and their standing in the community. The spotlight is on Obama and how his race affected his campaign for president. In order to gain more perspective on Obama's win several theories are introduced. We look at Obama in relations to Dawson's "The Black Utility Heuristic", Phillips's "Politics of Presence", "Race Relations Cycle", "Citizenship-Development Cycle" and Childs and Krooks's "Critical Actors" theory.

Results show that Obama is not just a Black president but rather he tries to be the president for the United States as a whole. The fact that he avoided making his race the focus point does not change the fact that his win is a big step towards greater equality for Black people in the U.S. Obama seems to be part of a new generation of Black politicians whose situations differ greatly from that of their predecessors from only a few decades ago. These different situations and political climate might just be a part of the secret behind Obama's success.

Formáli

Ritgerð þessi er lokaverkefni mitt til BA prófs í stjórnmálafræði við Háskóla Íslands. Hún er metin til 12 eininga (ECTS) af 180 eininga námi. Ritgerðinni var skilað í byrjun árs 2012. Hugmyndin að þessu verkefni kviknaði þegar ég var í skiptinámi við Ohio State University og sat námskeið sem kallaðist "Black Politics" hjá Harwood McClerking. Leiðbeinandi minn var Silja Bára Ómarsdóttir og vil ég þakka henni sérstaklega fyrir góða leiðsögn. Einnig vil ég þakka kærasta mínum og sambýlismanni Ísaki Sigurðssyni fyrir mikla þolinmæði og aðstoð á meðan á verkefnavinnunni stóð. Og að lokum vil ég þakka foreldrum mínum fyrir hjálp við yfirlestur og uppsetningu á verkefninu.

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Introduction

African Americans are a minority group in the United States (U.S.). Most of their ancestors were not voluntary immigrants of the country and were sold as slaves. This history of African American people in America makes them an interesting group to study from a political science perspective. African Americans as a group have through the years been called many different names like colored, Black, Negro and of course African American. Some of these names, such as nigger are used in derogatory ways. The politically correct name for the group is African American. However the concept of who is African American is not clear. Usually, when people think of African Americans, they think about the slaves who were involuntarily brought to the United States and their descendants. There are however a number of more recent voluntary immigrants from Africa that have dark skin color. This makes things more complicated in terms of trying to figure out the group but I will not go into trying to figure this problem out in this thesis. For the purpose of this thesis I will use the word Black or Blacks for African Americans when referring to people who identify as being black or African American in the U.S. census. It can be argued that skin color alone does not make you Black but rather that being Black is more about culture and whether you identify with Black people as a group. Using the Census definition allows me to use the respondents' own identification as the basis of my analysis.

In 2008 Barack Obama won the U.S. presidential election. He is the first Black President of the United States. How could a member of a minority group win election for the country's highest office in a nation-wide election? In order to explain how a Black man could become president of the United States I will look at a brief history of Black people in America and look at their political strength and position. I will use Michael Dawson's theory on "Black Utility Heuristics", the "Pluralist Model" and the "Race Relations Cycle", Ann Phillips's "Politics of Presence" and finally Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook's "Critical Actors theory". I will then take a look at Obama, his background and briefly how he ran his campaign for president. I will do this to try and understand how the political environment of the Black community relates to Obama becoming president.

When researching for this thesis I used books and articles from a course I took at Ohio State University called "Black Politics" as the starting point. Then I went out and found articles online and books that were referenced in some of those books and articles and/or I

thought would give more insight into the topic I was trying to cover. Along with material about Black politics and the history of Black people I also used material based in feminist theory.

1   Overview of Black People in the United States

1.1   African Americans in Numbers

Black people make up about 13.6% of the total population in America. There are about 308 million people in America and of that number about 42 million are Black according to the 2010 census.[1] According to the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of race (from the 2010 census):

> "Black or African American" refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicated their race(s) as "Black, African Am., or Negro" or reported entries such as African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian.[2]

According to the definition in the first U.S. census from 1790:

> A person of mixed white and Negro blood should be returned as a Negro, no matter how small the percentage of Negro blood. Both black and mulatto persons are to be returned as Negroes, without distinction. A person of mixed Indian and Negro blood should be returned as a Negro…. Mixtures of non-white races should be reported according to the race of the father, except that Negro Indian should be reported as Negro.[3]

According to this definition in the first census all persons who are of any known African ancestry are defined as being Black or African American. The United States is the only country in the world with this definition of Black people. This means that if a Black man and a white woman have a baby that baby is defined as being Black, even though the baby is half white. The census changed in 2000 where people were allowed for the first time to check more than one race on the census questionnaire. This change was made to try to reflect a new time where mixed races are more common. Ideas were raised about creating a new category for people of mixed races but that might have taken political power away from Black people so they went for the option of checking more than one box. Instead of simplifying things the 2000 census only seems to have made things more complicated than they already were because now people can fall into more than one category and essentially be counted twice.[4]

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[1] Humes, Karen R., Nicholas A. Jones, and Roberto R. Ramirez. *Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010* (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011) 4. (I am looking at the numbers for "African American alone or in combination).

[2] Ibid, 3.

[3] Robert C. Smith and Hanes Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom,* 5th edition. (New York: Longman, 2010), 257.

[4] Ibid, 257-259.

1.2 Geographical Distribution of Blacks

During the American Civil War most Black people in America lived in the rural South. Since then the Black population has become increasingly urban and has migrated North. This happened because of racial restrictions in the South after the American Civil War and more economic opportunities in the North and West.[5] In the ten cities with the highest number of Black people there are around six million black people or 16% of the total black population.[6] The fact that Black people are grouping together in areas increases their political power potential. The question that remains is: are they turning that potential into real power and influence?[7] More than half of the Black population, or 55.6%, lives in the South.[8] All of the 10 States where black population is 20% or higher are in the South.[9,10] That makes the South a potential place for Black political power and influence. This potential power for Blacks faces serious problems though. These cities where Blacks have the potential to be influential and regain power are at times poor cities with more poor people coming in while the richer population relocates. These cities therefore have fewer resources and the control of these cities can be more of a liability than strength.[11]

The geographical distribution of Blacks has another big part to play in outcomes when you look at the first-past-the-post electoral system in the US. How votes are distributed across districts can have as big an impact on elections as can how they are distributed among the parties. There are two ways in which distortion in the translation of votes into seats can happen in the US voting system. The first is called *malapportionment* which happens when you have radically diverse districts choosing one representative who does not necessarily meet the needs and wants of the entire voting district. The second is called *gerrymandering* where district boundaries are deliberately manipulated for some particular, usually partisan, advantage. Instead of placing the responsibility of redistricting in the hands

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[5] Lucius J. Barker et al, *African Americans and the American Political System,* 4th edition (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 22

[6] Drewery, Jr Malcolm P., Tallese D. Johnson, Elizabeth M. Hoeffel and Sonya Rastogi, *The Black Population: 2010 (*U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), table 1 and table 6.

[7] Barker et al, *African Americans and the American Political System,* 22.

[8] U.S. Census Bureau, "Race Data," Regional Distribution of the Population by Sex, for Black Alone and White Alone, Not Hispanic: 2010, http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/race/ppl-ba10.html (retrieved 05.12.11).

[9] Here I look at the census numbers for the "Black or African American alone or in combination population".

[10] Britannica-The Online Encyclopedia, "The South," Britannica: Academic Edition, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/555542/the-South (retrieved 01.12.11) and Jesse McKinnon, *The Black Population: 2000* (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), 4.

[11] Barker et al, *African Americans and the American Political System,* 22-23.

of a commission that was non-partisan or multi-partisan as is done in most countries, in the US the responsibility falls largely in the hands of politicians. And because of how important the district lines are to the outcome of elections these decisions are being challenged in court. This places the responsibility for the drawing of district lines more and more in the hands of the judiciary.[12]

1.3   Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action

Education is an important political issue for exploited and oppressed people and is a way for groups to gain a higher standard of living and a better quality of life. Education has been an important issue for Blacks in their fight for equality dating back to the civil war. Without education Black people would be forever second rate citizens so the battle for education for all was a very important civil rights issue.[13] An important civil rights victory came with the ruling in the case of Brown v. Board of Education. The court ruled that racially segregated schools where unconstitutional under the 14th Amendment. This ruling overturned the legal basis for the "separate but equal" segregation that had been sanctioned in the 1896 case of Plessy v. Ferguson.[14] The 14th Amendment, section 1 states:

> All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law; nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.[15]

This amendment was approved by the House of Representatives in 1866 and ratified by the necessary three fourths of the States two years later. The amendment faced opposition from States that did not believe that "inferior races" should be treated as equals to the whites. The "inferior races" were not only Blacks but also Native Americans and the Chinese on the West Coast.[16]

Even though education was early on an important issue for Black people, it also became a dividing issue for the Black community. Education was a means of assimilation and made it easier for Black people to adopt the values and attitudes of white people, which in turn

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[12] Richard S. Katz, Political institutions in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67-69.

[13] bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 98.

[14] Katz, Political institutions in the United States, 210-211.

[15] The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Constitution of the United States," http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html (retrieved 03.11.2011), 14th Amendment, section 1.

[16] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 30.

made education suspect for many within the community. Some black people therefore feared that education would move the individual from the group and make them less aware of the everyday Black experience. Group identity has been and still is important in the Black community so education was respected but also feared. Being aware of the collective circumstance of Black people is considered an important part of belonging to the group. [17,18]

This is something that made Black people suspect of Obama early in the election. He was very well educated and his connection to the Black community was questioned. In her book *The Breakthrough* Gwen Ifill wonders about the relationship between the civil rights era Black leaders and the new generation of Black leaders, like Obama. The new generation of Black political leaders bear much resemblance to white political leaders, they are well educated and come from middle class families. Today's Black leaders are not preachers like Al Sharpton or Jesse Jackson.[19] The Black church became an important institutional foundation for the Black community following the forcible separation of Blacks from whites in the late nineteenth century. The Black church became a forum for political discussion and organizing. Many of the civil rights heroes like Martin Luther King came from the Black church and that is why the civil rights leaders spoke in the preacher style; most of them actually were preachers. This new generation of leaders however has not grown up in the same political climate. Moreover they have opportunities that the civil rights era leaders did not have. In many cases they have had access to quality education and do not have to use the church as their political platform.[20]

High quality education however is not necessarily accessible for all Black people so the government tries to ensure equality. One example of how the government tries to ensure equality in education can be seen in affirmative action policies. Affirmative action policies and programs were put into place in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the combined effort of the courts, the president, Congress and many of the States themselves. Affirmative action policies and programs are meant to give Black people and other minorities, including women, access to material benefits and rights when it comes to education, employment and government contracts. The main reasons behind affirmative action are to compensate Black

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[17] hooks, *Talking back: Thinking Feminist Thinking Black*, 98.
[18] Black people who like school are sometimes called oreo's because they are black on the outside and white on the inside.
[19] Gwen Ifill, *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama (*New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 26.
[20] Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies (*Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 51.

people for past discrimination, to implement and enforce what was outlined in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and lastly to create diversity in education, employment and government contracting.[21] Affirmative action is a controversial topic in the United States. Not everyone agrees that affirmative action is necessary. Does giving a member of a social group unmerited advantages because of past grievances seem fair? The person getting the advantage did not themselves experience the unfair treatment. This might seem to be in contradiction to the idea of a "color blind society".[22]

Ann Phillips asks the question: "Is it enough to give people formal equalities, or do we also need to address the structural obstacles that prevent certain groups from making full use of their equal rights?"[23] When most Blacks talk about equality they usually mean equality of outcomes according to Michael Dawson. Martin Luther King believed that in order to reach full equality there needed to be an implementation of quotas.[24] Black Liberals view equality as including equal opportunity as well as an equal share of the "fruits of the nation".[25] They argue that the State has a right and an obligation to make minimum guarantees that its citizens have the opportunity to live a productive and autonomous life within the community.[26]

1.4   Voting behavior

"*Hands that picked cotton can now pick presidents.*" Jesse Jackson 1984[27]

The Civil Rights movement fought hard to achieve equal rights for Black people. A big step was taken with the passing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 which allowed all Black people to vote.

> No voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.[28]

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[21] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 238.
[22] Katz, Political institutions in the United States, 211.
[23] Ann Phillips, *The Politics of Presence: The Political Representation of Gender, Ethnicity and Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 35.
[24] Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies*, 60.
[25] Ibid, 240.
[26] Ibid, 258.
[27] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 160.
[28] Our Documents, "Transcript of Voting Rights Act (1965)," National Archives, http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=100&page=transcript (retrieved 28.11.11).

Before the passing of the Voting Rights Act there was a sentence in the 15th Amendment that seemed to guarantee Black people the right to vote. The 15th Amendment to the Constitution, section 1 states:

> The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.[29]

Despite this Amendment to the Constitution "free negroes" were only allowed to vote in six States during the years between the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and the end of the Civil War in 1865. During the years between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, three States actually took back the right to vote from the Blacks. New York did not completely take the rights away but restricted voting by requiring Blacks to show ownership of property valued at $200.[30]

The Civil Rights Act of 1965 was a big step but getting the right to vote is only the beginning. In order to really exercise the power that voting gives you, you have to make sure you are registered to vote and actually turn out to vote. Therefore it is extremely important for a group that wants to maximize its political power to make sure that as many people as possible are registered and show up to the polls.[31] From the mid 1960's until today nearly two thirds of the Black population has been registered to vote. More than half of Blacks during the same period voted in presidential elections, but there is a 10% gap between registered voters and those who actually show up to vote.[32]

A study of Black candidates running for higher office in the U.S. showed that the mere presence of a Black Democrat on the ballot increases black turnout by 2.3% while a Black Republican has no effect on turnout. This also affects white turnout because a Black name on the ballot for either party increases white turnout by 2.2%. Given the size of the population the white increase is significantly higher in plain numbers. White Democrats and white Republicans alike are also less likely to vote for their party nominee if he or she is Black. This helps to explain why so few Blacks get elected to office in state-wide elections.

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[29] The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, "Constitution of the United States: Amendments 11-27," http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html (retrieved 03.11.11), 15th Amendment, section 1.
[30] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 160.
[31] Barker et al, *African Americans and the American Political System,* 73.
[32] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 162-163.

Black Republicans are disadvantaged in this area because they can't expect the Black increase in voting like the Black Democrats can.[33]

1.5 Black Representation

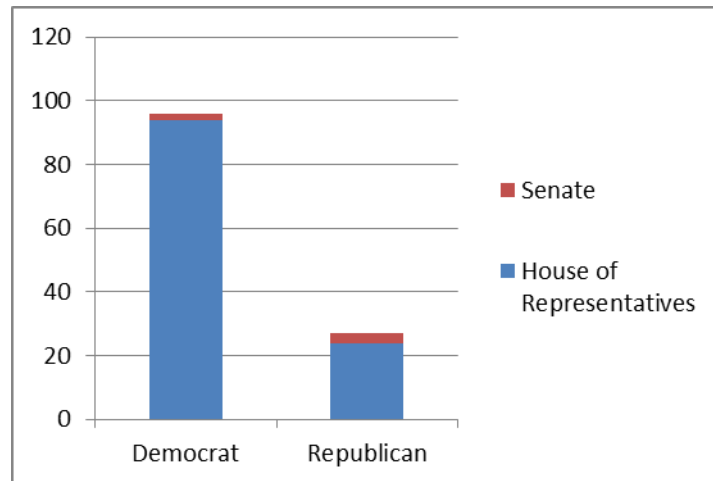Figure 1. below shows the absolute numbers of Blacks in Congress since 1870.

Figure 1: Absolute number of Blacks in Congress since 1870.

There are 44 Black representatives in the current 112th Congress, all in the House of Representatives, while there are no Black representatives in the Senate. Only two of the 44 are members of the Republican Party, the rest are Democrats.[34] Since 1870 there have been a total of 123 Black members of Congress, 118 of whom were elected to the House of Representatives and only five to the Senate. Of these 123 Blacks in Congress, 96 were Democrats and 27 were Republicans.[35] The first Black people to be elected for Congress in 1870 were Jefferson Franklin Long and Joseph Hayne Rainey for the House and Hiram Rhodes Revels for the Senate.[36] By being a member of the Senate Revels was also officially the first Black person to be a member of Congress and Joseph H. Rainey was the first Black member of the House. Shirley Grisholm who was elected to the 91st (1960-1971) Congress was the first Black woman in Congress. Since then there have been 25 other Black women

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[33] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 167.

[34] Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives, "Historical Data," Black Americans in Congress, http://baic.house.gov/historical-data/representatives-senators-by-congress.html?congress=112 (retrieved 19.11.2011), 112th Congress.

[35] Mildred L. Amer, *CRS Report for Congress: African American Members of the United States Congress: 1870-2008* (Congressional Research Service, 2008,) 1.

[36] Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives, http://baic.house.gov/historical-data/representatives-senators-by-congress.html?congress=112, 41st Congress.

elected to Congress but only one of them served in the Senate.[37] Shirley Grisholm was also the first serious Black candidate for the U.S. presidency.[38]

Since 1870 the number of Black people in Congress has steadily risen. In the 91st Congress (1969-1971) the number grew to ten members, then in the 98th (1983-1985) it surpassed 20 for the first time. In the 103rd (1993-1995) the number had reached 40 Black members. Since then progress has slowed down and the number of Black people in Congress at any time is around 40 with a record of 43 serving in the 109th (2005-2007) Congress.[39] Blacks in the House of Representatives rarely go on to seek election to the Senate or Governor of a State as is the predicted career path of representatives. In fact only two Blacks have left the House in order to seek state-wide office, like Governor. And even when they run, Blacks tend to lose. Of the 21 major party nominees since the 1960's only four Blacks have been elected to the Senate. There have also been ten nominees for Governor in the same period with only one success.[40]

Black people represent about 13% of the US population but only about 10% of the House of Representatives and for the time being 0% of the Senate. So Congress is not representative for Black people. Nor is it a representative body for Latino's or women.[41] This is not what the makers of the Constitution intended. They wanted to make Congress the dominant branch of government. Congress has legislative powers and John Locke wrote once "it is not only the supreme power of the commonwealth, but sacred and unalterable in the hands where the community have once placed it." John Stuart Mill also made the case for the connection between legislation, representation and democracy.[42] Representative democracy, he said is a "modern and contemporary conception which characterizes any version of democracy which highlights decision-making by the elected representatives of the people."[43]

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[37] Amer, *CRS Report for Congress: African American Members of the United States Congress: 1870-2008,* 1.
[38] Molefi K. Asante, "Barack Obama and the Dilemma of Power: An Africological Observation," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, (2007), 108.
[39] Amer, *CRS Report for Congress: African American Members of the United States Congress: 1870-2008,* 1.
[40] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 165-166.
[41] Ibid, 182 and Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives, http://baic.house.gov/historical-data/representatives-senators-by-congress.html?congress=112.
[42] Barker et al, *African Americans and the American Political System,* 181.
[43] Michael Saward, *Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 150.

Those who speak for "Politics of Presence", like Ann Phillips, are critical of how liberal democracy has traditionally viewed democratic citizens as the same and not attached different characteristics to the concept. A democratic citizen is someone who, because they belong to the State, has certain rights and obligations as a result.[44] Phillips argues that representative government is about what the representative does, not who they are. It is about their ideas and not about their race, gender etc., but that in order to achieve this "Politics of Ideas" we need to first make sure that groups are represented in high numbers for those ideas to really come through. She argues that we should press for the "Politics of Presence" and allow previously unheard voices to be heard. Parliament should broadly represent the country at large and it should not matter if for example all of the Black representatives represent "black" interests or not. It is their presence that makes the difference towards equal representation.[45]

1.6 Blacks as a Political Force

Since the 1970s Blacks have made up around 20% of the Democratic Party's electorate while they only represent around 10% of the overall country. The Black vote can therefore be a deciding factor in determining the party's presidential nominee because of size and geographic distribution. Even though the Black vote is important for the Democratic Party to the point where it can count on nearly 90% of the Black vote the party doesn't really want to be labeled as the Black party or the party that most Blacks prefer. In order to gain the votes of the so called "Reagan Democrats" the party has even distanced itself from Blacks and moved more to the right on the issues of concern to Blacks.[46]

According to Michael Dawson Black partisanship is based on Blacks' "perceptions of each party's responsiveness to the needs and interests of the Black community." So according to Dawson it is racial identification that determines Black Democratic partisanship, not economic interests or other class based issues.[47] The Democratic Party has a 50 year history of supporting Black policy preferences. Dawson argues that for Blacks with a strong sense of linked fate the Democratic Party is the best choice for Blacks to protect their

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[44] Saward, *Democracy,* 134.
[45] Ibid, 135.
[46] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 135.
[47] Ibid, 135.

interests. Dawson has a theory on this linked fate which he calls the Black Utility Heuristic, more on that theory in the next chapter.[48]

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[48] Melissa Harris-Lacewell and Jane Junn, "Old Friends and New Alliances: How the 2004 Illinois Senate Race Complicates the Study of Race and Religion." *Journal of Black Studies* 38, (2007): 37.

2 Frames of Reference to Understand Black Politics

2.1 Black Utility Heuristic

Black Utility Heuristic is a theory by Michael Dawson. He argues that perceptions of economic racial-group interests are the basis of Black identity. It is strange to see that with the Black population being so divergent that there is not more heterogeneity. Blacks are a much more homogeneous group than whites and are more unified across class. Dawson argues that this homogeneity comes in large part from institutions and networks within the Black community that reinforce a sense of group identity. These institutions and networks place a lot of emphasis on a highly racialized view of the world and promote group political consciousness. Another key part in the explanation as to why the Black group identity is so strong comes to light when we look at the issues more closely. On issues such as taxes, partisanship, the role of government, fiscal policy and other similar issues, Blacks remain on the left and unified in their position. However when it comes to strategy, tactics and norms of the Black quest for social justice the Black population is much more divergent. Dawson argues that the majority of Blacks see their fate linked to that of the race.[49]

When researchers think of racial group identification as a heuristic they mainly think of this in two contexts. First when Blacks are presented with a choice between two white candidates they can look at which candidate has a political platform that best matches their group interests. Second if presented with a Black candidate and a white candidate Black voters can use the racial identity of the candidates and vote for the one who is more similar to them. Voters then look at the Black candidate who "looks like" them and think that they will likely share their political position. This racial heuristic can make the decision easier for voters when they are confronted with a political race that reinforces partisan expectations, for example if a Black Democrat runs against a white Republican. Things can get a little complicated however when voters are presented with a choice between choices that challenge partisan expectations. If we think of a Black Republican running against a white Democrat some voters will vote for the Black Republican because of racial identification with the candidate. Other black voters will vote for the white Democrat using similar racial

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[49] Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies*, xii (preface).

identification, because they link the Democratic Party with being compatible with Black political interests.[50]

2.2 The Pluralist Model, Race Relations and Citizenship-Development Cycle

> The experience of Negroes in America has been different in kind, not just in degree, from that of other ethnic groups; it is not merely the history of slavery alone but also that a whole people were marked as inferior by the law. And that mark has endured. The dream of America as the great melting pot has not been realized for the Negro; because of his skin color he never even made it into the pot. -Justice Thurgood Marshall[51]

The so called Pluralist Model says that the United States is a country that moves towards a stability and equilibrium so that no one group predominates. It views the U.S. as a melting pot of different ethnic communities that melt together and form one big integrated nation. The model assumes that when new groups join the melting pot they are first considered outsiders and with that they are put into a subordinate category. Over time this new group will integrate into the society and become more Americanized until they are finally accepted as full and equal members of the American nation. To support this view the histories of Irish Catholics and European Jews are brought up and used as examples. So according to this model it is only a matter of time before Black people are accepted as part of the melting pot and achieve full status as Americans. This model however did not fit the Black peoples experience so far in American society. Many ethnic groups that came to America long after the Blacks achieved "full membership" while Blacks were still kept aside. To amend this problem and make the model fit better Robert Park and Talcott Parsons offered some input. Park created the Race Relations Cycle where he argued that when different cultures came into contact their relations went through four different stages; contact, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. The theory was made to explain "the pattern of sociocultural relationships that developed following the contact of racially different cultures", so it was a general theory and not aimed at the Black peoples experience in particular. According to this theory the weaker group adapts to the rules and ways of the stronger one and that paves the way for the assimilation of the group into the dominant culture. Park argued that this process of assimilation would solve the so called "race problem".[52]

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[50] Harris- Lacewell and Junn, "Old Friends and New Alliances: How the 2004 Illinois Senate Race Complicates the Study of Race and Religion," 38.

[51] Barker et al, *African Americans and the American Political System,* 1.

[52] Ibid, 6-7.

Parsons was interested in the political relationship of the two clashing culture groups. His "Citizenship-Development Cycle" had three stages where struggle for basic legal rights would be the first. After that there would be a fight for full and effective political participation and once that was achieved the group would fight for the same economic and social resources the dominant group had so they would be on equal footing with the other group.[53]

The model has received some criticism. This model is based on the idea that there is an almost automatic process to assimilation of a group into a bigger one, and that the Black population in America is going through the same process that the European immigrants went through when they first came to America. The people who use this model and believe in it use the journey of the European immigrants as a map to follow the progress of the African Americans in society. By comparing the Blacks to European immigrants, people often question why Blacks have not made the same progress. This puts the blame on the Blacks and oversimplifies their history and their journey. "Consequently, public policies that evolve from such discussions are more concerned with transforming black people than with transforming the circumstances that structure their lives. Such comments, criticisms, and policy prescriptions flow quite naturally from the model"[54] Critics have pointed out that these models are not suited for describing the dynamics of Black politics because the Black struggle does not fit into the model and is not compatible with the struggle of the European immigrants. These kinds of theories can put the blame on Black people and fuel racism.[55]

2.3 Racism and Discrimination Defined

"Racism involves the subordination of people of color by white people".[56] Racism can be unintentional and the person can even be unaware of the fact that they are behaving in racist ways. Racism can also be very intentional. People of color can discriminate against white people but they are not being racist. Racism is not only the act of hating someone or treating them unfairly. Racism is prejudice plus power. Throughout history people of color have been discriminated against by white people, not the other way around.[57]

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[53] Barker et al, *African Americans and the American Political System,* 7
[54] Ibid, 8
[55] Ibid, 8
[56] Paula S. Rothenberg, *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study (*New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 6-7
[57] Ibid, 6-7.

Racism in America was once socially accepted. Slaves were not thought of as being people and therefore were not given rights. This discrimination was so ingrained in the society that you can see it in the Constitution and laws from the time. The Supreme Court concluded in 1857 that both the North and South regarded slaves "as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."[58] The abolition of slavery was not even suggested at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787. Nonetheless several of the framers were against slavery, like Benjamin Franklin who was president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery at that time. Slavery was simply too controversial and these abolitionists knew that to suggest abolition of slavery would destroy the chance of forming a union. This does not mean that the framers ignored slaves completely in the making of the Constitution. In that time taxes were collected on the basis of a State population, the larger the State the higher the taxes. So the South did not want to count the slaves as persons to get out of paying more taxes. However when it came down to representation in the House the South wanted to count the slaves as persons, even though they could not vote, because that would give them more political power. The North did not agree to this and wanted the slaves to be counted for taxation purposes but not when it came to calculating the number of representatives in the House. Because of this disagreement the great compromise was made, the Three Fifths Clause, in Article 1, Section 2:[59]

> Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.[60]

This Three Fifths Clause shows how politically powerless the slaves were. They had no representative at the Constitutional Council to argue against this clause. Their standing in society was so low they were not even considered to be a whole person. They were being

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[58] Rothenberg, *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study,* 9.
[59] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 9-10.
[60] "The Constitution of the United States."
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html (retrieved 03.11.2011).

discriminated against in a constitution that claimed to be by "We the people" but they were not counted as one of those people.[61]

Individual discrimination is like the name suggests when an individual is prejudiced towards another individual or a group. This is the most common understanding of discrimination.[62] Institutional racism is defined as policies or programs that have racially discriminatory impact or effect.[63] Another word sometimes used to describe these effects is structural discrimination but for the purpose of this thesis we will continue to use institutional discrimination. Institutional discrimination is a cycle. If you discriminate against a black person and deny them a good education, they are less likely to get a good job. If that person is unable to get a job they will most likely not be able to buy a decent house. So the person will most likely end up in a bad neighborhood with inferior schools.[64] Organizational discrimination is when discrimination by the individual is reinforced by rules, policies and practices of organizations. Discrimination at the organizational level is often just regarded as the way things are done and the person performing these acts might not even be aware that they are discriminatory.[65]

2.4 Representation and Democracy

When you have racism and discrimination in a society it can be difficult to achieve fair representation for all groups. A common definition of democracy describes it as a matter of "one person, one vote" majority rule. Ann Phillips claims that a more useful definition identifies popular control and political equality as the two pillars of democracy. If you want to respect the popular control aspect of democracy it is not enough to claim to be pursuing the wants and needs of the people. The people themselves have to take part in the decision making. It was Plato who compared the art of good government to the art of captaining a ship. If we accept this comparison we might argue that it is best to be governed by those who have expertise and are trained in the founding principles of government. But most of us do not consider politics just a matter of technical expertise. People are human and what is

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[61] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 9-10.
[62] Rothenberg, *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study,* 10.
[63] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 242.
[64] Rothenberg, *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study,* 14.
[65] Ibid, 11-12.

right in politics is not always clear. So liberal democracy has leaned towards diversity through history and it is considered good for the system to have many viewpoints and a degree of skepticism towards the political elite.[66]

According to Phillips few people in today's society would argue against the rights of women to vote and even though there can be animosity towards a country's minorities few will actually suggest that a country fashion a system of two classes of citizenship defined by the color of one's skin. People are not arguing for a system where citizens' votes do not all weigh the same.[67] When we think of representation we have to think about who is best qualified to speak on behalf of others. This can lead to tension because people often have connections to different groups so the question becomes can a white woman represent a Black woman, and is the white woman a better representative for that Black woman than a Black man for example? This question became a source of tension with the development of feminist politics but we can see the connection to race politics as well. According to Phillips social class inequalities have not been the primary focus of the debate on inequalities, the debate has centered on groups. She insists upon a distinction between group inequalities and social class inequalities because the discussion would be split between the liberal position of "we should be equal regardless of difference" and the socialist position of "we cannot be equal until the class difference has gone". When we look at this from the group perspective it is not so simple. Women do not want to become men and Black people do not want to change the color of their skin to achieve equal rights.[68]

There are different ways to view representation. When we look at representation we can look at it through three different viewpoints, namely; descriptive, substantive and symbolic. Descriptive representation is concerned with who holds office. Substantive representation on the other hand deals with the types of policies passed and whether they correspond with the policy preferences of the electorate. When theorists analyze the dynamics of political representation they are concerned with the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. Symbolic representation deals with to what extent the people have trust in their government.[69]

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[66] Phillips, *The Politics of Presence: The Political Representation of Gender, Ethnicity and Race,* 27-28.
[67] Ibid, 29.
[68] Ibid, 8-10.
[69] Sarah Childs and Mona L. Krook, "Analysing Women's Substantive Representation: From Critical Mass to Critical Actors," *Government and Opposition* 44, No. 2 (2009): 182.

Childs and Krook analyze women's substantive representation in their article but for the purpose of this thesis their ideas can be transferred to Black representation as well because both women and Blacks can be defined as minority groups when it comes to their position in the political sphere. Childs and Krook explain that research on substantive representation often assumes that there is such a thing as "women's issues" or in our case "Black issues". And that when the number of women or Blacks increases in political positions we will see more attention paid to these policy areas. But how do we define these issues? Scholars do not agree to how this should be done, some believe that these issues are to be defined as policies that increase the autonomy and well-being of the minority group. Others might focus on issues that have come up from civil rights movements through history or even look at them as constructed by those who claim to represent the minority group.[70]

2.5   Critical Mass v. Critical Actors

Childs and Krook look at Kanter and Dahlerup's theory on "Critical Mass" in their article. Kanter and Dahlerup are considered the sources of the concept of critical mass but both also study women's behavior in minority situations in a more detailed way. Kanter for example looks at women's token status in a large American corporation in the 70's. Kanter offers three conjectures regarding group dynamics. Firstly she claims that "with an increase in relative numbers, minority members are potentially allies, can form coalitions, and can affect the culture of the group".[71] Secondly, that "with an increase in relative numbers, minority members begin to become individuals differentiated from each other",[72] and finally that "two … is not always a large enough number to overcome the problems of tokenism and develop supportive alliances, unless the tokens are highly identified with their own social group".[73]

Dahlerup identifies six areas where increased number of women might have an impact, but concludes that there is no evidence of a specific percentage number of women needed for this impact. She argues that other factors such as shifts in societal attitudes might better explain the change and lack of change following more women in office. Dahlerup believes in the importance of what she calls "critical acts" that "change the position of the minority and

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[70] Childs and Krook, "Analysing Women's Substantive Representation: From Critical Mass to Critical Actors," 133.
[71] Ibid, 137.
[72] Ibid, 137.
[73] Ibid, 137.

lead to further changes". These acts include the recruitment of other women, introduction to women, new equality legislation and equality institutions.[74]

Childs and Krook criticize "Critical Mass" theory by saying that there is an assumption in the theory that there is a linear relationship between numbers of women in office and positive outcomes for women. In their paper, Childs and Krook point to studies suggesting at least four other scenarios. First, a rise in the number of women can focus attention on women's issues and make male legislators pay more attention to issues affecting women. Second, there might be a backlash from increased number of women and male legislators might try to hinder policy initiatives and prevent women to get in positions of power. Third, fewer women might be more effective than many because they are able to specialize in women's issues without appearing to undermine male domination. And fourth, a rise in the number of women might result in the election of a more diverse group that does not concern itself so much with the traditional women's issues.[75] Childs and Krook introduce the concept of "Critical Actors" and argue that it is better suited to analyze women's substantive representation than "Critical Mass" or "Critical Acts". They place emphasis on agents over outcomes and define critical actors as "legislators who initiate policy proposals on their own and/or embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the numbers of female representatives."[76] They stress that these legislators do not necessarily need to be women and that they are much more motivated than others to initiate women-friendly policy reforms. Critical actors may both operate alone or motivate others to act. This mobilization can set in motion a positive policy change for women or create a backlash among those who oppose policy reform. As was discussed before, these theories talk about women but can be transferred to black people because of the similarities between the political position of Blacks and Women's as minority groups.[77]

In the next chapter we will look at Obama and try to find out if he is possibly a "Critical Actor" and more generally how his minority status affects his presidency.

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[74] Childs and Krook, "Analysing Women's Substantive Representation: From Critical Mass to Critical Actors," 138.
[75] Ibid, 126-129.
[76] Ibid, 138.
[77] Ibid, 138-139.

3 Obama

3.1 Barack Obama

Barack Hussein Obama announced his candidacy for president of the United States of America on February 10th 2007. When he announced his run for president he had only served two years of his first term as senator. His political career began in 1996 when he was elected to the Illinois Senate. In 2000 he lost a bid in the primaries for a seat in the House of Representatives. His opponent was Bobby Rush who accused Obama of not being "black enough", an accusation that would come up again later in Obama's political career. In 2002 he won reelection to the Illinois State senate. In 2004 he ran for a seat in the United States Senate. He won the senate race against Alan Keyes with 70% of the popular vote.[78] This senate race was the first in history where two Black men ran against each other for the two major parties in a U.S. Senate election.[79]

Barack Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawaii on August 4, 1961. His father, Barack Hussein Obama Sr. was born in Kenya and his mother, Ann Dunham was from Kansas. His parents split up when he was two years old and his father went on to pursue his Ph.D. degree from Harvard and later returned to Kenya where he died in a car accident when Obama was 21 years old. His mother married an exchange student from Indonesia and had one daughter with him. The family moved to Jakarta in 1967 where Obama attended school from age 6-10. He then returned to Hawaii to live with his maternal grandparents until he finished high school. Obama's mother died of cancer when he was 34 years old. Obama got his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Columbia University and later went on to study at Harvard Law School where he received a Juris Doctor degree in 1991. He was also the first Black president of the Harvard Law review and graduated magna cum laude. He is married to Michelle Robinson Obama and they have two daughters.[80]

3.2 The Road to the Presidency

Blacks have run for president before. Former candidates include Angela Davis, Shirley Grisholm, Lenora Fulani, Jesse Jackson, Carol Moseley-Braun, J.C. Watt and Al Sharpton.

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[78] Dewey Clayton, "The Audacity of Hope," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, (2007): 51-52.
[79] Harris- Lacewell and Junn, "Old Friends and New Alliances: How the 2004 Illinois Senate Race Complicates the Study of Race and Religion," 31.
[80] Clayton, "The Audacity of Hope", 52-53 and Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 139.

They ran for Democrats and Republicans and in some cases for a third party. What unites them is the fact that they all had a defined agenda. This agenda usually was centered on social issues and issues dealing with race and discrimination in American society. The candidates who came before Obama cleared the way for his candidacy according to Molefi Kete Asante. He argues that the Black candidates were all qualified for the job and the fact that they ran, even though they had little or no chance of winning, put a mental picture in the heads of white people of competent Black people on a political platform.[81] Asante believes that Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice also paved the way for Obama. Powell and Rice showed how Black people were capable of leading policy on the issues that confronted the country. If a Black person could serve as Secretary of State then why couldn't a Black man be president of the United States? Asante also points out that representation does not necessarily mean power and that even if Black people hold these high offices does not mean that the interests of Black people are represented.[82]

Obama's rhetoric has been one of hope. His ideas have been described as being visionary and he calls for an entirely new agenda instead of emphasizing his views on partisan issues of the past. He has inspired young voters and attracted huge crowds of young people during his presidential campaign. Obama seems to have understood that there existed a gap between what people thought the government should be doing and what it was actually doing e.g. in the case of the Iraq War. Obama answered this by taking a very Democratic position in a Republican war. Obama placed emphasis on America being a united whole. In the eyes of many he was the representation of a united America and all that can be good in the country. "In the eyes of some people, here was a man of international peace, of social vision, of dreams of what could be, and of what must be, to revive the American spirit."[83] Even though Obama portrayed himself to be a man of peace and hope he had to also prove that he was not a pushover. In order to win the race he had to prove that he would not crumble under pressure and that he would be willing and able to defend the United States and its interests if need be.[84]

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[81] Asante, "Barack Obama and the Dilemma of Power: An Africological Observation", 107-108.
[82] Ibid, 114-115.
[83] Ibid, 110-111.
[84] Ibid, 111.

3.3 A Deracialized Campaign

Deracialization is a theory that was developed after the elections of 1989 when a number of Blacks were elected to office in majority white constituencies. According to McCormick and Jones deracialization involves:

> conducting a campaign in a stylistic fashion that defuses the polarizing effects of race by avoiding explicit reference to race specific issues, while emphasizing those issues that are perceived as racially transcendent, thus mobilizing a broad segment of the electorate for the purpose of capturing or maintaining public office.[85]

A deracialized campaign focuses on issues that are important to the white middle class, such as tax cuts, health care and education while avoiding issues like affirmative action and welfare. A candidate who wants to run a deracialized campaign should avoid being linked to race leaders such as Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson and in general avoid looking "too black".[86]

This theory has received considerable criticism from Black scholars. Their main concern was that deracialization would take away from Black politics and allow Black politicians to be elected to office without representing Black interests when they served that office. Ronald Walters asks: What difference does it make to Black people that a Black man is elected to office if he is not using his position to advance Black people? Is it a hollow victory? Obama himself prefers to present himself as a post-racial or trans-racial politician and not a deracialized politician. He also claims that because of his diverse background he looks at himself as qualified to bridge the racial and partisan divisions in the country. He preaches some sort of post-partisan coalition politics and cooperation.[87]

3.4 Black Enough?

During Obama's campaign people speculated if he was Black enough to be the first "African American" president and if he had enough legitimacy as a Black man to get the Black vote. Obama is not the traditional African American because he is not a descendant of slaves but the son of a recent immigrant from Africa. Obama says himself in his book *The Audacity of Hope* that he is well aware that the part of the attraction of whites to him is the fact that he represents a "post-racial" era.[88] Obama has said, "I think there is a protectiveness and a

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[85] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 138.
[86] Ibid, 139.
[87] Ibid, 139.
[88] Ron Walters, "Barack Obama and the Politics of Blackness," *Journal of Black Studies,* 38, No. 1. (2007): 7-9.

skepticism within the Black community that is grounded in their experiences. But the skepticism doesn't mean there is a lack of support".[89] Barack Obama's campaign was special in many ways. He received widespread popular support very early in his campaign and was the first Black candidate to do so well so early. In fact he had to receive secret service protection on April 3, 2007 because of serious threats made to him by numerous persons. His campaign was also special in light of the fact that previous Black candidates had trouble raising funds while this seemed not to be a problem for Obama. He raised more than $25 million dollars in the first quarter of the political primary campaign in 2007.[90] Hillary Clinton raised $26 million in the same period. Obama's fund raising came from more than 100,000 donors, more than half through the Internet.[91] In the end more than half of the online donations of less than $100 came from 1.5 million donors, the highest in the history of any presidential campaign. Overall, Obama raised $240 million and Clinton only $195 million.[92]

Obama's success during the election gave his supporters hope that he could actually win. Some political scientists and political commentators however remained skeptical and feared that the hype around Obama would not show up in the election results. Perhaps they were skeptical because they knew how the Bradley effect could potentially have an impact. The Bradley effect will be further discussed in the next section.[93]

3.5   The Bradley Effect

A Gallup poll from 1958 reports that a majority of respondents or 53% said they wouldn't vote for a Black candidate. In 2003 only 6% said that they would not vote for a Black candidate for president. A Newsweek poll from 2006 reports even more strides have been made with only 3% of Americans saying that they were not willing to vote for a qualified Black candidate. Gallup has noted that polls that are taken when Blacks are running against

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[89] Clayton, "The Audacity of Hope", 60.
[90] Asante, "Barack Obama and the Dilemma of Power: An Africological Observation", 105-107.
[91] Clayton, "The Audacity of Hope", 61.
[92] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 141.
[93] Jason Carroll, "Will Obama suffer from the "Bradley effect"?" *CNN Politics*, October 13th, 2008. http://articles.cnn.com/2008-10-13/politics/obama.bradley.effect_1_bradley-effect-bradley-campaign-exit-polls?_s=PM:POLITICS (retrieved 30.12.11) and John Berman, "Will the Bradley Effect Be Obama's Downfall?" *ABC News,* October 14th, 2008. http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Vote2008/story?id=6031233&page=1 (retrieved 30.12.11).

whites in elections have done a better job in accurately predicting results compared to the past when racial biases could skew the results.[94]

The term "Bradley Effect" originated from the 1982 California State Governor race between Tom Bradley and George Deukmejian. Tom Bradley was a Black Mayor and the polls leading up to the election showed him in the lead. Bradley went on to lose the election to his white opponent by a close margin. After the election it showed that many of the white voters that had said that they would vote for Bradley did not and white voters who reportedly were undecided voted for Deukmejian. The Bradley effect happens when a statistically significant number of white voters tell pollsters that they are undecided or going to vote for the Black candidate out of fear of being perceived as being racist if they say they are going to vote for the white candidate. And then when it comes to voting they vote for the white candidate. The undecided votes go in an unusually high numbers towards the white candidate.[95]

3.6 Mobilizing the Black Community

Obama's campaign mobilized the black community in unprecedented ways. 31% of Blacks reported making a campaign contribution and 14% said they volunteered on the campaign. Obama received the highest proportion of the Black vote of any previous Democratic Party nominee, 95%.[96] As has been noted earlier Jesse Jackson's 1988 campaign for president can be seen as having paved the way for Obama's success in 2008. Jackson did not expect to win the party's nomination but rather have an impact on the Democratic Party. He wanted to mobilize Black people by increasing registration and turnout. He also wanted to try to change the more conservative course the party was heading in and make the party more democratic. Although he did not succeed in everything he set out to do in his campaign it is in some ways similar to Obama's campaign in 2008. Jackson and Obama both relied on the Black vote as their core of support. In addition they both received a disproportionally high support from young, white, well-educated, high income voters. Obama managed to attract a higher proportion of white middle class voters than Jackson which is in large part why his

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[94] Clayton, "The Audacity of Hope", 53.
[95] Clayton, "The Audacity of Hope", 54.
[96] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 172-173.

campaign for the nomination was successful.[97] Obama received 66% of the votes from the 18-29 year old voters and 52% from the 30-44 year olds voters also. He also got 69% of the votes from people who were voting for the first time. According to a CNN exit poll 95% of Black male voters and 96% of Black female voters voted for Obama in 2008.[98]

Obama's victory was not just impressive from a race point of view. He is not only a Black man that won a national election to become president of the United States but he is also a relative newcomer on the political scene. In order to win the nomination from the Democratic Party Obama had to beat some of the superstars of the party. His opponents were respected and had long impressive political careers behind them. Joe Biden, who would later become his running mate and vice president, was 65 and had served in the Senate for 36 years. His last remaining opponent Hillary Clinton was a 60 year old former first lady and two-term U.S. senator. This, coupled with his African heritage and an unusual foreign sounding name, made his victory even more incredible.[99]

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[97] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition, 138.
[98] CNN-Election Center 2008, "Exit Polls," CNN.
http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#USP00p1. (retrieved 28.11.2011).
[99] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 139.

Discussion

Obama and his political success is an interesting subject from a Black politics perspective. He has tried not to let his race be a big factor in his political career and maintains that he represents a post-racial era. He likes to think of himself as representing the whole country and that his bi-racial background helps him bring the nation together.[100] However his race has been prominent in the discussion surrounding his candidacy for president and his subsequent win. This might not be surprising if we look at the history of Black people in the U.S. as we have done earlier in this thesis. Black people have struggled for their rights to vote and they are underrepresented in Congress.[101] With this history in light Obama's victory becomes quite unbelievable and extraordinary.

Obama's effort to keep race out of the campaign as much as possible made it seem like he was running a deracialized campaign. The theory on deracialization, like we have discussed before, has received criticism from Black scholars. Can you say that Obama is representing Black people if he ran a deracialized campaign? Is it enough just to have a token Black person in power if that person is not representing Black interests?[102] These are legitimate questions especially when we look at Obama's candidacy from the perspective of Ann Phillips. Phillips and her "Politics of Presence" theory tackle this same topic of representation. Phillips argues that in order for minority groups to get their voices heard in representative government they need to be represented in high numbers. Only then can "Politics of Presence" start to be about the "Politics of Ideas" where it is about what the representative does, not the color of their skin or their gender.[103] Obama might then be considered an important step towards equal representation even though he is not able to represent Black interests to the degree Black people want him to. Another important thing to consider is also Obama's claim to be a post-racial politician. Is it possible that he is right and that his election is an indication that the U.S. is moving on from race?

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[100] Smith and Walton Jr., American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom (5th edition), 139.

[101] Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives, http://baic.house.gov/historical-data/representatives-senators-by-congress.html?congress=112, Our Documents, "Transcript of Voting Rights Act (1965)," National Archives, http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=100&page=transcript (retrieved 28.11.11).

[102] Smith and Walton Jr., *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (5th edition), 138-139.

[103] Saward, *Democracy,* 135.

The Theory of "Critical Mass" is similar to Phillips's "Politics of Presence". Kanter and Dahlerup argue that a certain "mass" of women is needed in order for them to have an impact in the political sphere. Childs and Krook put forth their theory on "Critical Actors" in response to this theory. They want to emphasise agents over outcomes, it matters more what you do than who you are, similar to what Phillips talks about when she mentions "Politics of Ideas".[104] Is Obama then a "Critical Actor"? It can be argued that he is based on how he succeeded in mobilizing people however it is not clear whether he has really set in motion a positive policy change for Black people in particular.

Black people have struggled through the decades to be on equal footing as the rest of the U.S. in terms of having the same rights and opportunities. This struggle has united them and made Black people a far more homogeneous group than they sometimes appear to be. Michael Dawson argues that a majority of Black people see their fate linked to that of the race. He developed the theory on "Black Utility Heuristic" and according to that theory it is easily explained why Obama got the majority of the Black vote. He is both a Democrat and a Black man.[105] He did not win on the Black votes alone, however; in order to become president of the United States Obama had to appeal to white voters too. Unlike the Black candidates before him, like Jesse Jackson, Obama succeeded in attracting votes from the white middle class. Does that mean that racism in the U.S. has all but disappeared and that Black people are accepted as full members of the U.S. society?

According to the "Race Relations Cycle" developed by Robert Park immigrant groups go through four different stages when they come into contact with the existing population. These stages are contact, conflict, accommodation and assimilation.[106] Even though this theory has been criticized and is in my opinion quite flawed, perhaps because it was not aimed at Black people's experiences in particular, it is still useful for the purposes of this thesis. Assimilation is according to the cycle when the weaker group, in our case the Black people, has adapted to the rules and ways of the dominant culture, in this case the U.S. nation. The Black culture has in a way been afraid of assimilation, as we saw in the chapter about education and affirmative action.

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[104] Childs and Krook, "Analysing Women's Substantive Representation: From Critical Mass to Critical Actors,"
[105] Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies*, xii (preface).
[106] Barker et al, *African Americans and the American Political System, 6-7.*

Obama represents assimilation in the eyes of some Black people and as was mentioned earlier he has been accused of not being "Black enough". Obama wants to see this as proof to his view that he is a post-racial politician, but some of his critics point out that he acts just like a white person and therefore he is not a Black politician. This connects to the claim that he ran a deracialized campaign. Obama represents assimilation because he got a good education and in many ways behaves like a white person, or as an American as he would like to put it. Does Obama's victory mean that Black people are finally accepted as full members of the United States?

Talcott Parsons "Citizenship-Development Cycle" is a bit more helpful when we use it to analyse Black people. He has three stages: Struggle for basic legal rights then a fight for full and effective political participation and finally a fight for the same economic and social resources possessed by the dominant group.[107] According to this cycle it can be argued that Black people are still on stage two, fighting for full and effective political participation. However it can also be argued that Obama's victory is a sign that Black people might be moving on to stage three, fighting for the same economic and social resources as the dominant group.

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[107] Barker et al, *African Americans and the American Political System*, 7.

Conclusion

It was not Obama's intent to be a Black president. He says so himself that he considers himself an American first and maybe that is how we should treat him. He wants to be the president who unites the nation, not just a president for Black people. His win however is a step towards equality for Black people because now generations of Black children will grow up with the knowledge that there was once a Black man President of the United States. Just like generations of Black children who grew up in the 1980s saw Jesse Jackson not to mention the impact of Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell. The fact that he avoided the subject of his race in the campaign and perhaps ran a deracialized campaign does not change the impact his win had on equality in the U.S.

Obama's victory in the elections in 2008 was a historic step towards equality. A member of a minority group was elected to the highest office. People from that same minority group were only a few decades ago denied basic rights in American society. A lot has changed since the Civil Rights fight and it seems that Obama represents a new generation of Black political leaders. His win does seem to indicate that the U.S. has come a long way and that Black people are now considered full members of the society. This change might be a big part of Obama's success.

Even though Obama is not just a Black president does not mean that he can't set in motion a positive policy change for Black people. He is in my opinion a "Critical Actor" based on his success in mobilizing Black people and his will to be a president for the entire country, whether it be for Black people, Asian Americans, white people or other groups.

I reach this conclusion based on the materials I read while researching this thesis. This thesis is not a complete study of all facets of this subject. The thesis is based on books and papers written by others that are available to me and not an original research. However, based on the work I have done, I find that Obama's victory is an indication that he can be a "Critical Actor" and that he is a very important step in Black peoples fight for more political power. He reinforces Phillip's ideas where she says that minority groups need to first strive for "Politics of Presence" in order to achieve the "Politics of Ideas". Like was said earlier, his presence in such a high power position is an important step in reaching full equality in the U.S. even though there is still a long way to go.

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