

**ISSUE OF RACE IN AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS:
A CASE STUDY OF 2008 ELECTION**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

VANLALPARI



**AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAMME
CENTRE FOR CANADIAN, UNITED STATES AND LATIN
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NEW DELHI – 110067

INDIA

2011



Date: 25.07.2011

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled, "ISSUE OF RACE IN AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF 2008 ELECTION" submitted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

VANLALPARI

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My utmost gratitude be to God who gave me the opportunity and the health to complete my studies in due time.

I am highly indebted to my supervisor, Prof. Christopher S. Raj who gave me tremendous support and invaluable advice as well as his valuable time to guide me in this research. I sincerely express my gratitude to him for his intellectual guidance for the improvement of the quality of my work and his patience to correct the many flaws of a beginner. The limitations in this research though remain are my own and mine alone.

I am also extremely grateful to all the faculty members of the Centre for Canadian, United States and Latin American Studies for their guidance throughout my course work. All the friends and fellow scholars who assisted me in this research are also worthy of mention and my special thanks goes to them. I would also like to mention and thank the Central Library, JNU and the American Centre Library and their staffs without which the resources necessary for this research would be a difficult task to extract.

Last but not the least, to my family and my dear ones who stood by me throughout my trying times and whose unending prayers has been my greatest strength for the completion of this work, thank you.

25.07.2011


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In loving memory

of

my father

Vanlalrova (L)

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Preface

Issue of race has always been an inherent problem and one of the most contentious issues in America especially in relation with the African-American community. The African-American community as we know have been subjected to this problem ever since they were brought to America as slaves. Though today, they enjoy status as equal citizens with freedom to participate in the politics of America, they still face racial prejudice from the white community. With the granting of the Voting Rights Act to them in 1965, the community's electoral participation has increased tremendously. As this is the case, using racial cues for political gains has been common in the local, state and national level politics of America. Since overt racism is on the decline in America and many blacks have succeeded in getting elected even from majority white community, the election of a candidate from the African-American community as the President of America in 2008 have resulted in a new trend of racial politics in America. Many scholars have claimed the rise of post-race America and the end of traditional black politics in America.

This research, therefore, is an examination of racial issues prevalent in the presidential elections of the US by taking the 2008 presidential election as a case study. Analyses on how the race card was played in this election and what effects it has on mainstream American politics as well as on black politics of America have been made. The research has dealt only with the issue of race in relation to the African-American community. An observation has been made on deracialization as political concept both in black as well as national politics. Based on this concept, analysis has been made in order to find out whether this concept has been effective for Obama's election, thereby to assume that America has entered a post-racial era and that traditional black-centred politics is weakening. The present research has particularly focussed on the concept of deracialization to examine its effectiveness as a political concept both in black politics and national politics of America and whether it has been effective for ushering a new racial era in

America, post-racism as is famously known. One important thing that needs mentioning is that the terms blacks and African-Americans have been used interchangeably as they both represent the same community.

The introductory chapter has enumerated the research questions and the hypotheses as well as a brief mention of the history of racism in America and the usage of racial cues in American presidential elections prior to Obama's election have been made. The first main chapter i.e. Chapter 2 has discussed the meaning of the concept of deracialization as given by various scholars along with Obama's approach towards race and the issues connected with it in order to make a connection of deracialization and Obama's policy towards race. Chapter 3 is purely a discussion on how racial issue emerged in the 2008 presidential election, with a focus on the Democratic Primaries and the general election. Apart from this, the voting patterns of various races in America have also been briefly mentioned as relevant for the topic. Chapter 4 of this research deals particularly with black politics – its evolution and development; and the relation of Obama's politics with black politics – how Obama relates himself to black politics, the differences and similarities of his policies from traditional black politics and why Obama has been the only successful candidate from the black community. Finally, Chapter 5 of this research, the concluding chapter, includes the main analysis and discussion of this research. In this chapter, the arguments for the questions that have been mentioned before as well as the findings for the two proposed hypotheses have been given.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The election of Barack Obama to the highest office of America in November, 2008 seems to have resulted in a new trend of racial politics in America. Many scholars have claimed the rise of post-race America and the end of traditional black politics in America. Not only has his election demonstrated the breaking of the colour barrier that has prevailed in the Presidential Election of the country since the United States of America was born, but has also shown that presidential candidates from a minority community can garner enough white vote to succeed. The coming of Obama into office as the first coloured President of America have compelled many scholars to believe that there is a growing change in the racial politics of mainstream American politics and in the political leadership of the black community. Though some scholars opined that there is no such shift but rather a continuation, others believed that the US is entering a new era of post-racial politics where the issue of race is no longer central to voters perception about candidates and in which candidates from minority communities can succeed in the mainstream national politics by propagating a new policy called 'deracialization' where race has been minimized and inter-racial coalition is built in order to have electoral success.

Definition and Scope of Research:

This study, therefore, is an examination of racial issues prevalent in the presidential elections of the US by taking the 2008 presidential election as a case study. Analyses on how the race card was played in this election and what effects it has on mainstream American politics as well as on black politics of America have been made. The research has dealt only with the issue of race in relation to the African-American community. Through this research, patterns of change or continuity of racial politics that are prevalent in presidential elections especially after the 1960s have been

highlighted and by focussing on the 2008 election, the effectiveness of Obama's policy and approach on race for his election and what changes it has brought about in racial relation of America have been discussed and analysed. Based on the concept of deracialization of race, analysis has been made in order to find out whether this concept has been effective for Obama's election, thereby to assume that America has entered a post-racial era and that traditional black-centred politics is weakening.

The main focus of this research has been on the following issues:

- Deracialization as political concept both in black as well as national politics.
- Obama's stand on the issue of race and his policy towards racial issues.
- The effects of Obama's racial policy in the 2008 election.
- The impact of this policy on mainstream American racial politics.
- The impact of this policy on black politics of America.

Issue of Racism in America:

In order to have a better grasp on the issue of deracialization and post-racism, it is important to have a brief understanding of racial relation in the US between the black and white communities. Let us therefore take a brief look at the history of racism in America. Race is one of the most contentious issues in America. Waller (1998) has argued that race is and always has been the most divisive issue and the fault line running beneath America's landscape. Especially in relation with the African-American community this stands true even today. In effect to this, Waller (1998) has argued that black-white relations are the crucial paradigmatic case of racism historically and in the present. This is because the most visible sign of racism by the white community is seen in the black community. The community has been subjected to white prejudice and hatred first through the institution of slavery where they had no rights and were treated as property. In bringing out the true essence of slavery and the intentions of the white community at that time, Pitcaithley (2002) has argued that the

institution of slavery had been built on deep and imbedded racism towards African Americans and on the concomitant presumption of white supremacy.

Somehow the Civil War ended the institution of slavery through the Thirteenth Amendment of the United States' Constitution even though it was never the intention of the Union to bring full emancipation to the slaves. The institution of slavery was forever diminished in America, but the institution of racism was cemented further with the rise of Jim Crow laws which propagated segregation. Blacks during the Reconstruction era (1865-1896) were not allowed to mix freely with the whites and they were segregated in all public places, educational institutions and public transport systems. Though they had been granted freedom, they were very far from attaining equal status of citizenship of America like the whites. Instead, all kinds of racial subjugation were hurled towards them, especially in the southern states. Lynching of blacks, torture and abuses were common. Even in the north, though this was less experienced yet they were not allowed to fully participate in the social, economic and political sphere. One of the most famous racism exerted during this time was the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the 'separate but equal' doctrine in public schools through the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case (1896) which required or permitted racial segregation in these schools.

This finally resulted in the coming out of the black community to protest for equality and electoral rights in what came to be known as the 'civil rights movements' or the 'freedom movements.' These protests movements were led by educated blacks who fought vigorously for the rightful place of blacks in the American society. Finally, the civil rights movements of the 1960s granted them equal citizenship status and the right to vote through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These, however seem to stand as mere legislative measures because the black community from this period till today is still struggling for the complete fulfilment of these two rights especially in concern with the lower class blacks. Though the black community has grown tremendously and the educated and successful blacks may hardly face racial prejudice in today's America, it is a totally different case with the poorer and less educated blacks. Many whites still connects crime, drug abuse and other social degradation with blacks.

Though in recent years, overt racism is declining tremendously in America, it still remains a huge problem. Addressing this aspect, Bobo and Charles (2009) have argued that although the proportion of whites who negatively stereotype blacks and other minorities has declined significantly, negative racial stereotypes remain the norm in white America. According to them, an important change in the modern racial stereotyping is the way that many express their views because in the past whites openly show that they consider blacks and other minorities as biologically inferior; however, these days, racial and ethnic stereotypes are typically expressed more in terms of degrees of difference, rather than as categorical group distinctions (Bobo and Charles 2009: 246). Whites tend to blame blacks as lacking motivation and the will and effort to uplift their own community and label them as irresponsible, lazy and too much dependant on federal welfare programmes.

But at the same time, since overt racism is no longer propagated as was done before, many whites tend to believe that racism is over in America. Though it is true that American racial relation is indeed making positive headways, racism is still persistent in America. Ever since the 1960s, many white Americans believed that the nation's race problems were fundamentally solved by the civil rights movement (Pettigrew 2009: 280). The work of Bobo et al. (2001) have clearly shown a survey which was conducted in 2000 where 34 percent believed racial equality has been achieved already and 18 percent whites believing that it will be achieved soon (cited in Pettigrew 2009: 280).

At the same time, blacks' perception of racism is completely different. Majority of them uphold the idea that whites are to be blamed for all their sufferings and their pains, that overcoming white prejudice would solve all racial problems. This was the central theme of the civil rights movements. Blacks during this time protested against white injustices and blamed whites as being responsible for their condition. This is in fact true if we consider the racial history of America. As blacks became more active in politics chiefly due to the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, black political leaders started using political forums to push for the development of the community. They made use of this black agitation to further their electoral success and worked hard to uplift the community if elected. Though they got full support from the black community, they however began to lose white residents with many whites

moving out of their jurisdictions because they tend to over propagate black cause. And with the blacks as well, as will be discussed in detail in the coming chapters, since many of them lived in poor neighbourhoods with most of them dependent on federal funded programmes, they soon became disheartened on these politicians once these funds were reduced or diminished as was the case during Reagan's administration. These politicians found it difficult to work progressively without these funds. Soon, black politicians who were less race-specific in nature began to gain prominence. The rise of these black politicians in the early 1990s began a new era in black politics and has been called by scholars as the new black politics which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. Thus, with the rise of the new black politics in which race is significantly minimised and with the decline of overt racism towards the African-American community, it is of extreme interest to examine how racial issues continue to play their significance in electoral politics in America especially with the election of Obama.

With the tremendous growth of black participation in electoral politics both as a voting bloc and as electoral candidates, the realisation of the importance of black vote for electoral success and the need to play the race card to disadvantage an opponent led to growth of injecting race in elections be it the local, state or national level. Especially in relation to presidential elections, racial issues became important in every presidential campaign from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Mayer 2002) and till today, they are an important part of American national politics. Every presidential candidate, even from the fight for nomination for candidacy, has used racial issues to further their ends. Voters on their part have also voted for candidates who favour their cause the most. The 2008 presidential election has been the most interesting one by far. For the first time, an African-American became the candidate for presidency from the Democratic Party and went on to win the election as well. How exactly the race card was played in this election then becomes an interesting topic of discussion. Therefore, a brief examination of how race-cards have been played in past presidential elections prior to the 2008 election will now be made so that it will be easier to grasp the concept when discussion on how the race card was played in the 2008 election will be done in the subsequent chapters.

Playing the Race Card in American Presidential Elections:

In highlighting the importance of race in American presidential elections, Mayer (2002) has noted that race and the array of issues surrounding it have been crucial to every presidential election since 1960 (Mayer 2002: 3). He has stated that the presidential contests have been affected by racial issues in years when race was central to the nation's agenda and in years when race was submerged by a host of other issues. In his words, "Race always mattered in presidential campaigns, whether the candidate was liberal or conservative, Democratic, Republican or independent (Mayer 2002: 4)." His work mainly discusses how past presidential aspirants have played the race cards to garner votes for their successes. He believed that racial politics of America is undergoing a paradigm shift in the 21st century and that its importance will slowly decline in presidential politics. But he clearly states that race however will not disappear as a consideration in electoral campaigns. Concerning African-American candidates in particular, Pasek et al. (2009) have written that although overtly anti-African-American racism has declined dramatically during the last half-century, a variety of surveys continue to suggest that African-American presidential candidates may nonetheless have a non-zero disadvantage because of racism (Pasek et al. 2009: 947).

As it was Lincoln and his party (the Republican Party) who got freedom for the African-American community, for a long time till 1936 when Roosevelt came up with the 'New Deal,' the community had voted loyally for the Republicans. But the New Deal shifted the black vote towards the Democrats and till today, the community is strongly supporting the Democratic Party. At the same time, majorities or pluralities of whites voted Republican in ten of the eleven presidential elections from 1960 to 2000, turning Democratic only in the Johnson landslide of 1964 (Mayer 2002: 4). Even after this, in the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections, this trend continued with 58 percent of whites supporting George W. Bush from the total 77 percent white voters as compared to his opponents John Kerry's 41 percent (cnn.com) and McCain won 55 percent of white votes over Obama's 43 percent (Lopez and Taylor 2009).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 brought tremendous change in black electoral participation and ushered in tremendous growth of black

electoral power. Mayer (2002) believes that the full enfranchisement of African-Americans was more significant because blacks shared a common economic and ethnic history, a cohesive set of political goals, a great tendency to cohere as a voting bloc. He made this argument in light of the women enfranchisement which occurred a little before the civil rights movements and based this as the reason why women voters were not as important as African-Americans as a voting bloc. From this time on, black vote could no longer be considered as insignificant. This therefore, led to the growth of presidential hopefuls to try to woo the community but it was the Democratic Party which became more successful in this as mentioned before. This was common not only at the national but also at the local and state level as well.

However, since the white community is the dominant voting bloc especially in presidential elections, candidates are most often, more concerned with the white vote. Thus, candidates use racial cues, in most cases implicitly, to get more votes for themselves. Mayer (2002) has mentioned that "Playing the race card" is the strongest pejorative in modern political parlance, because of the sense that race should be viewed as a moral issue (Mayer 2002: 7). He has made this argument in light of the fact that appeals to racial fears or tensions persist despite the prospect of harsh criticism illustrating the effectiveness of these tactics, as well as the enduring nature of America's racial divide (Mayer 2002: 7). When discussing about the use of race in electoral campaigns, Mendelberg (2001) has highlighted two ways of using it. She says that racial issues can be conveyed either in an implicit or explicit ways by candidates and their respective parties to influence voters. According to her, explicit racial appeal is the one in which the message conveyed to white voters carry nouns or adjectives to endorse white prerogatives, to express anti-black sentiment, to represent racial stereotypes, or to portray a threat from African-American. While, implicit racial appeals convey the same message as explicit racial appeals, but they replace the racial nouns and adjectives with more oblique reference to race. However, it is the implicit means that is most commonly used by political aspirants.

Most of the times, candidates have played the race card for their advantage even if it means parting with their initial stand on the issue of race. Richard Nixon was successful in creating a Republican majority based on white backlash even though he was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People

(NAACP) before he sought the presidential office. He appealed to white racists in the South who were abandoning the Democrats for their role in ending legalized segregation, by emphasizing issues like “law and order,” which were strongly linked in voters’ minds to race or rather blacks who were seen as proponents of crime and moral degradation. Whites cannot be totally blamed for this because it is true that blacks are the major offenders of society, however, one must also remember that it is the whites’ policy towards blacks that has increased crime and lawlessness in the black community. This strategy of Nixon to link law and order with blacks has become a common practice amongst Republican candidates.

Ronald Reagan also campaigned vigorously for the presidential election of 1980 in support of states’ rights which he delivered just outside Philadelphia, Mississippi where three civil rights workers were murdered. However, the most notable implicit racism used by a candidate would be the 1988 presidential election where George H.W. Bush came out victorious. Bush’s campaign ran an ad where his opponent, Michael Dukakis was portrayed as being soft on crime because of a black convict Willie Horton, who escaped and assaulted a white couple raping the woman. Initially, bringing race out of this did not seem to be the intention of the Bush campaign, and no one really related the issue to racial issue until Jesse Jackson Sr. charged the Bush campaign team as running a racialized campaign. Bush went on to win the election even though his ratings fell tremendously after this incident. According to Mendelberg (2001), “It was not until Bush’s veto of the 1990 civil rights bill that Jackson’s charge was adopted by journalists as the conventional interpretation of the Horton appeal, that the Willie Horton campaign was about race was obvious only three years after it transpired (Mendelberg 2001: 4).”

Even Democratic Party has not been free from playing the race card. President hopeful and Vice-President of the US (1965-1969), Hubert H. Humphrey at first, vehemently endorsed the civil rights, then later wooed George Wallace’s supporters by opposing busing but finally rejected his racist past to get re-elected as the governor of Alabama with tremendous black support. Then, there was Bill Clinton who returned to Arkansas in the run up to the 1992 New Hampshire primary to oversee the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, a mentally disabled Black man, of which he proudly proclaimed that he was the only candidate who had personally enforced the death

penalty. In the same election, Clinton made it a point to criticize comments by the hip-hop artist Sister Souljah at a speech he gave to Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, and repeatedly lectured African-American audiences on the need for them to take "personal responsibility" for their problems. Four years later, to secure his reelection, it was Clinton who "ended welfare as we know it," in a move that disproportionately hurt minority groups (Gasper 2008). Even though George W. Bush reached out to the black community during his presidential campaigns of 2000 and 2004, little was gained by the Republicans. To make matters worse for the Republican Party in their effort to woo more African-Americans, his administration's response to the Katrina Hurricane in 2005 has been criticized by many as an act of racism. Gillman (2006) has summed up the Katrina incident as an unprecedented opportunity to communicate that "racism" is not just a matter of the psychology of hatred but is instead also a matter of the racial structure of political and economic inclusion and exclusion. However, the administration had its fair share of playing the race card because of the appointments of two blacks to head top offices – Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell.

In all these elections, candidates relied on implicitly racial appeals. They often do not know or are careful enough to not show that their messages carry racial tones. According to Gasper (2008), in the post-civil rights era it is, of course, no longer acceptable to make openly racist comments, but U.S. politicians have long since mastered the art of appealing to racial prejudice in coded ways. Mendelberg (2001) has made an argument that politicians appeal to race implicitly because in order to win they need to mobilize whites' racial resentment while adhering to the norm of racial equality established during the 1960s. Most of the time, white voters are unaware of the racial message and their support is motivated by racism. In fact, the racial reference in an implicit message, while subtle is recognizable and works most powerfully through white voters' racial stereotypes, fears and resentment (Mendelberg 2001: 7). The Bush Sr. campaigning of 1988, thus, is a clear example of implicit racial appealing style. This is also a very effective method considering the fact that racial prejudice towards blacks is still very active in the American society. Since many conservative whites still attach crime and moral indecency to blacks, therefore, candidates who seem to be sympathetic towards the black community often

tend to lose white vote. This can be clearly seen from the continuing white support to white candidates who are conservative in their approach as mentioned before or rather majority white vote still going to the Republican Party.

Since every presidential election after America was born have had solely white candidates fighting for the seat, racial issues though always important never did raise much hype as did the 2008 presidential election in which for the first time, a black man won the nomination seat from the Democratic Party. As discussed above, since the major voting bloc in American elections is still the white community, in the 2008 election too, it was of extreme importance for Barack Obama to appeal to white voters if he were to win the election. He knew very well that though he might not be able to win majority white vote, he should at least get significant white votes to get him elected. Apart from the fact that Obama being a black man would need to appeal significant white voters, Hill (2009b) has mentioned that Obama entered national politics at a time when it was perceived that the period of overt racist public statements and actions had passed from the scenes and any residual cases of such were anomalies. This suggests that, even the American society has made significant development towards racial relations and that it was also unnecessary to explicitly express concern over racial issues.

Unlike the previous US presidential elections where racial issues had been used sometimes explicitly or most times implicitly as discussed by scholars like Mayer (2002) and Mendelberg (2001) to name a few, racial issues and the way they were used as political strategies by the candidates in the 2008 election seem to differ (Smith and King 2009: 30). The major reason being that Barack Obama, the candidate from a minority community - the African-American community which have famously struggled against racial injustice, himself avoided treading directly on racial issues (Marable 2009: 1, 6, 10; Sinclair-Chapman and Price 2008: 740) and so did his opponent in the general election, John McCain (Tesler and Sears 2010: 54; Cooper and Powell 2008; Todd and Gawiser 2009: 12). Unlike past aspirants from the African-American community like Jesse Jackson most notably, Obama did not want to be labelled as a proponent of solely the black cause. Instead, he followed a deracialized policy and downplayed the issue of race itself. Thus, many see his election as the coming of post-racism in America. To these, racism has taken a back

seat and a more pragmatic, multiracial politics is taking its place. Even concerning black politics in particular, Obama's victory has been claimed as the decline of black-centred politics and the maturation of deracialised black politics. It is then clear that Obama's political strategy is different especially concerning racial issues and that this new policy seem to suggest the rise of a new era of racial relation in America. Several literatures have mentioned Obama's policy on race in the 2008 election and what changes that his election have ushered in racial relation of America. Since many scholars have claimed that America has moved into a post-racial era as well as the end of black politics, it is of immense interest whether this claim can be justified or not. A thorough examination of how racial issues were used as political strategies and how Obama in particular dealt with it will be the main discussion of this research. Though scholars have often used various other theories to explain the impact of race and racism in American politics, this research however will examine racial issues prevalent in the 2008 election through the concept of deracialization. Let us therefore briefly examine various literatures that have dealt with Obama's policy on race and the issue of post-racism in America that has become a lively debate because of his election.

Literature Review:

In particular relation to the 2008 presidential election, writers like David O' Sears and Michael Tesler have also used the effectiveness of 'symbolic racism' in studying the racial relations with 2008 election and tried to explain the effects of racial resentment in the primaries and later in the general election. Other scholars have also tried to use various theories related to race in order to explain the influence of race in the 2008 election. But further discussion on these will not be made as the main focus of this research is on how candidates themselves play the race card or rather how they handled the race issue and in this particular case, the concept of deracialization will be examined as this was the political strategy of Obama for dealing with the issue of race. Various scholars have made interesting comments about the concept of deracialization and its development in American politics. In particular relation with

the 2008 election and Obama, various arguments have been made by scholars in relating deracialization with Obama's policy.

Perry (1996) has stated in his work that current scholarship on black politics in the United States is characterised by a very lively debate on the importance of deracialization in American politics. Deracialization, as applied to American electoral politics, is the conduction of an electoral campaign in which racial issues and themes are minimized, if not avoided, in order to attract increased white electoral support (Perry 1996: 1). Perry (1996) has brought the works of various scholars together who examined deracialization at all levels of the political system. From this he has crafted a synthetic assessment of the deracialization concept and has concluded that deracialization will supplement but not replace traditional black politics at least not in the foreseeable future. He believes that African Americans elected to public office in majority black districts and jurisdiction will continue to embrace racial themes and issues in their campaign and governing styles. Based on this finding, an examination could be made on whether Obama's election has supplemented or replaced traditional black politics.

When discussing the 2008 presidential election, many scholars like Ford (2009), Marable (2009), Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) and others have categorised Obama's policy as similar to the new black politicians who no longer make appeal on narrow racial solidarities and who have moved on from traditional black-centred politics. Ford (2009) has particularly mentioned that Obama's political strategies reflected those of the new, younger black politicians who have made it possible for blacks to win election. This new political method employed by these new black politicians can be considered as the deracialized policy as explained by scholars above which somehow suggest that white racism is no longer the barrier to black success and that the old style of black politics which relied heavily on racial bloc voting and influence peddling within the black community may be obsolete as discussed by Ford (2009). However, he mentions that Obama's strategy of not appealing to narrow racial solidarities have also cast a shadow on Obama's racial loyalties.

Though Obama is the symbol of change in American race relations, Ford (2009) also argues that race and racism remains and they seem as blatant and implacable as ever.

He observes that Obama's election has resulted in a new type of racial consciousness especially among the whites to make distinction between successful blacks and the black American underclass who carry with them negative racial stereotypes. Therefore, Ford (2009) argues that this new racial attitude will come at the expense of majority blacks who still battle poverty and that this makes it unclear whether the Obama phenomenon will mark the renewal of civil rights or repudiation of its historical commitment to the most disadvantaged.

On discussing about Obama's policy on race while campaigning for presidency, the eminent scholar of black politics, Manning Marable (2009) has mentioned that Obama minimised the issue of race presenting a race-neutral politics that reached out to white Republicans and independents but even in spite of this, that he was still racialized by many of his critics. He also made a note of the possibility seen by many scholars that America has finally become post-racial with Obama's victory and claimed that Obama being elected as the chief executive was a stunning reversal of American history. Marable (2009) also mentions the growing popularity and successes of those black politicians who followed race-neutral and pragmatic policies and went on to win city councils, state legislatures, and seats in the House of Representatives.

Marable (2009) argues that Obama also follows this same policy as these new types of black politicians and that his campaign was clever enough to follow this policy in order for him to succeed. As mentioned by other scholars, Marable (2009) also highlights that though Obama acknowledged his indebtedness to the Civil Rights Movement, Obama spoke frequently about the need to move beyond this and seek a post-partisan politics of hope and reconciliation and that this very same appeal caused others to view Obama as not loyal to the black cause. Apart from Obama and his policy, Marable (2009) also makes a mention of the fear of many whites that America is fundamentally changing ethnically and racially because demographically, the white majority is rapidly vanishing and that white supremacy is no longer sustainable. However, he believes that the Obama victory will be of great assistance in waging the struggle for racial justice.

Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) like other scholars have mentioned in their work that Obama represents a new age of African American public officials where they claim

that Obama is the face of the next generation. They have also acknowledged that the past successes of the black candidates who advocated post-racial policies and had 'cross-over' appeals like Obama helped Obama's cause. Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) have mentioned that the Obama campaign was aware of the need for biracial appeals and also argued that though this is the case, black politicians like Obama have to prove that they are not abandoning the African American community when multiracial coalitions are assembled. In concern with Obama's policy, they also mention that Obama's rhetoric targeted the majority voters. Even though they believe that the continuing growth of successes of black politicians will only be fully tested as time moves on, Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) concludes that it is clear that African American candidates are becoming more competitive for top official positions.

Smith and King (2009), on examining Obama's policy on race and what this can imply on the future of American racial politics, argue that Obama faced complementary strategic challenges when campaigning for the presidency as a black American when most voters leaned toward colour-blind policies. They believe that using 'race-neutral' policies in his campaign was the best option for Obama in such a case. According to them, Obama's policy to build a broader coalition of those who favour colour-blind policies and those who favour race-conscious measures by not talking about race and minimizing its impact in the election permitted colour-blind and race-conscious advocates to interpret Obama's rhetorical emphases on both unity and change in terms congenial to them. The work of Smith and King (2009) on discussing what this election of Obama means for the future of America's racial politics mentions that Obama's success does not signal the dawn of post-racial era and have also acknowledged that the election of 2008 rather clearly depicted a form of racial progress in America.

Unlike other scholars on race and the election of 2008, Harris (2009) has called Obama's policy as deracialized black policy instead of the race-neutral policy used by most of the scholars. Harris (2009) deals particularly with what Obama's election meant for the black community of America and believes that the success of Obama in many ways symbolizes the maturation of black politics; from protest traditions to the possible beginning of a process of normalization. Like other scholars, he also mentions that Obama's policy is a reflection of the approach that minority candidates

have been using since the 1980s. Harris (2009) then gave the argument for what the solid support of the black community for Obama meant and has come to the conclusion that though this meant a progress of black politics where many supported the idea that one needs to downplay his race in order to succeed, racism is still persistent in American society and that many are still a victim of it. Harris (2009) therefore welcomes the new black politics and finds it interesting to keep a tab on what policy the Obama led government will adopt concerning social policy.

These arguments postulate the policy Obama executed to successfully play the race card. It is clearly visible that it differs a lot from the way the race card was played in previous presidential elections. But at the same time, it also a necessity for it to be different because, this time, unlike previous elections where white candidates have to appeal to black voters and other minorities (purely excluding the white vote), a black candidate had to appeal to white voters for their support without alienating his own community so that he could get solid support from his community while at the same time a significant support from other minorities plus the white vote. Since whites are still majority voters in America, candidates from a minority community must focus largely on this group, and this was exactly the position of Obama. Since he was from the black community, it was extremely important for him to propagate his policies as unthreatening to white voters but at the same appealing to blacks and other minorities.

Apart from the policy propagated by Obama, the debate about whether his election has ushered in a post-racial era in America is another hot topic for scholars. Parker et al. (2009) have examined the role of racism and patriotism in the 2008 presidential election where they have highlighted that race and patriotism were recurring themes during the 2008 presidential campaign and that they were used to highlight the differences between Barack Obama and his opponents. They examined the role that racism and patriotism played by drawing on two theories of racism to explore how race may have affected White support for Obama, namely laissez-faire racism and symbolic racism. From their study, Parker et al. (2009) have concluded that America has not moved on to a post-racial era because in the 2008 election both race and racism played critical roles.

Scholars like Thomas F. Pettigrew (2009) have argued that America is not yet post-racial. He gave his argument based on the fact that racism still persists in American society and was also present in the 2008 election. He has pointed out that it was a 'perfect storm' of interlocking factors that have got Obama elected; that bigots had voted for Obama; that there were logical fallacies that underlie the too-optimistic view of post-racial America; that racist attitudes and actions repeatedly occurred throughout the campaign; that White Southern and older voters both demonstrated that rank racism remains and finally that increased turn-out of young and minority voters was crucial for Obama's election. Pettigrew (2009) however believes that even though Obama's election does not mean the end of American racism, it definitely signifies a great transformation in American race relations and that racial prejudice among the young will recede steadily.

Most literatures on the role of race in 2008 presidential election have mentioned that Obama has followed a race-neutral approach and that this strategy worked for him. It is however clear that most are also critical of the claims that America is now post-racial even though writers like Matt Bai suggested the possibility of it. There is, however, a consensus that America is witnessing a gradual change in its race relation. The concept of deracialization is hardly mentioned in most of these literatures though there is mention of race-neutral policies which can otherwise be claimed as similar to deracialization because the main strategy of deracialization and running race-neutral campaign is to minimize one's race and make an universal, race-neutral appeal so that a candidate may be able to build inter-racial coalition as his support group.

In any case, scholars mentioned before have mostly concentrated on what Obama's success implies on the race relation of America. Therefore more analyses can be made on what Obama's concept is on race; how he deals with it; how the race card was played in the presidential election and how effective was this with voters; and why he has become the only black to succeed on national politics which is what will be highlighted in the various chapters of the research. In this research, questions as mentioned below have been explored and two hypothetical stands have been raised so that a better assessment of racial relation and racial politics of America, in particular what Obama's election have brought about, can be made.

Research Questions:

- Does the victory of Obama in the 2008 presidential election signify the beginning of an era of post-racial politics in the US?
- Does the election of Obama mean that the importance of the issue of race in presidential election is declining?
- Does the election of Obama mean a maturation of deracialized policy in black politics as well as the end of traditional black politics?
- Does growth of influence of deracialization in black politics imply the decline of importance of race in contemporary American politics?
- Will the 21st century be the end of racial politics in America?

Hypotheses:

- Mainstream American politics is slowly moving on from racial politics to post-racial politics.
- Traditional black-centred politics is declining, thereby making racial issues more subtle in black politics as well as national politics.

Structure of the Research:

The present study has therefore addressed the research questions and hypotheses in the formulated chapters. The first main chapter i.e. Chapter 2 will be on the discussion of the meaning of the concept of deracialization as given by various scholars along with Obama's approach towards race and the issues connected with it. Here, the main focus has been to highlight whether Obama's policy towards race has similarity with the concept of deracialization. The following chapter, i.e. Chapter 3 is purely a discussion on how racial issue emerged in the 2008 presidential election, with a focus on the Democratic Primaries and the general election. The Republican Primaries has been intentionally excluded in the discussion as there was no relevant racial issue during the primaries of the Republican Party. Apart from this, the voting patterns of

various races in America have also been briefly mentioned as relevant for the topic. The primary focus of the chapter has been to highlight how race was injected into the election from the primaries to the general election and how Obama dealt with it. And from the statistics of voter turnout and voting pattern, another focus has been made on racial voting patterns, growth of voter turnout, increased voter registration amongst women and young voters and white voters' perception and their votes.

Chapter 4 of this research deals particularly with black politics – its evolution and development; and the relation of Obama's politics with black politics – how Obama relates himself to black politics, the differences and similarities of his policies from traditional black politics and why Obama has been the only successful candidate from the black community. The various evolutionary stages of black politics have been mentioned in this chapter and the various ideologies that inspired black politics and their various programmes have been highlighted with a mention of important black leaders. Chapter 5, the final chapter of this research, is the concluding chapter and housed the main analysis and discussion of this research. In this chapter, the arguments for the questions that have been mentioned before as well as the findings for the two proposed hypotheses have been given. In this research, a focus has been made particularly to examine the effectiveness of deracialization as a political concept both in black politics and national politics of America and whether this concept is effective for ushering a new racial era in America, post-racism as is famously known. One important thing that needs mentioning is that the terms blacks and African-Americans have been used interchangeably as they both represent the same community.

Chapter 2

Deracialization and Obama

There's not a Black America and White America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America.

– Barack Obama, July 27, 2004

The concept of deracialization is mostly related with black politics of America. It became more prominent after African-American political leaders were elected in great numbers in the 1989 November elections in the US. Even though black politics of America will be discussed in detail in a separate chapter of this research, an examination of the concept of deracialization in particular has been given because it is based on this concept that an explanation on how the race card was played in the 2008 presidential election has been made in this research. So then, what exactly is deracialization? The study has so far been concentrated in the realm of local and state level politics of the US and has not been given that much importance for national level politics. However, the 2008 presidential election changed this approach because racial relations of the US witnessed a tremendous change with the election of the first coloured president of America. This therefore compels one to question how this election is possible as the victor is from a minority community. Surely, one has to go beyond the issue of race to appeal enough white votes to succeed (?). In this chapter, the discussion begins on what deracialization is. Definitions as given by scholars in the topic will be highlighted and analysed. This will then be followed by Obama's take on racial issues, how he dealt with the issue especially prior to his 2008 Presidential election victory. Finally, there will be an analysis of Obama's approach on racial issues and the concept of deracialization – whether they resemble the same political strategy or not.

The issue of race is very important and critical in American politics from as long as the time America had to deal with the issue of slavery and immigration as listed in the introduction. As we know, the black community witnessed the most overt form of racism in America and therefore, when black politics emerged more prominently during the 1960s where America witnessed the Civil Rights Movements, the politics that black politicians at that time propagated was largely shaped by the demand for equal rights in America. From this period on, black politics was influenced and shaped by various political ideologies propagated in the form of protests and agitations which have a strong support of race-based policies in order to make progress for the community. Many black politicians followed this policy and were successful to some extent; a detailed explanation of this will be done in Chapter 4.

For a long time, most of the black politicians that were being elected were from majority black districts who favoured race-based policies. By the twenty-first century however, hundreds of race neutral, pragmatic black officials had emerged, winning positions on city councils, state legislatures, and in the House of Representatives. Frequently they distanced themselves from traditional liberal constituencies such as unions, promoted gentrification and corporate investment in poor urban neighbourhoods, and favoured funding charter schools as an alternative to the failure of public school systems (Marable and Clarke ed. 2009: 4). It is believed by scholars such as Marable (2009) that the rise of this new leadership reflects a range of divergent views on social policy ideologically. These new politicians no longer pursue race-based politics even though they still identify themselves as African-Americans. They have moved on from the race-centred politics once highly favoured by black politicians.

Perry (1996) has stated that current scholarship on black politics in the US is characterised by a very lively debate on the importance of deracialization in American politics. According to Orey and Ricks (2007), it was Charles Hamilton who introduced the concept of deracialization in 1973 at a National Urban League Meeting. They mentioned that Hamilton encouraged blacks to develop coalitions with other races, especially whites. According to them, "As a means of gaining white support, Hamilton suggested that blacks should address social issues that made broad appeals to society as a whole (Orey and Ricks 2007: 326)." The definition of

deracialization has been given by McCormick and Jones as “conducting a campaign in a stylistic fashion that defuses the polarising effects of race by avoiding explicit reference to race-specific fashion issues, while at the same time emphasizing those issues that are perceived as racially transcendent, thus mobilizing a broad segment of the electorate for purposes of capturing or maintaining public office (cited in Orey and Ricks 2007: 325).”

Deracialization, as applied to American electoral politics, is the conduction of an electoral campaign in which racial issues and themes are minimized, if not avoided, in order to attract increased white electoral support (Perry 1996: 1). Basically, what this suggests is that the concept of deracialization promotes race-neutral policies that are to be used by candidates from minority communities to garner white votes for their political success. In support of this, Albritton et.al (1996) concluded in their work that race neutral political strategies build upon the notion of a deracialized politics that deemphasizes the issue of race in voting decisions. Such as electoral strategy may be aimed at broadening the appeal of African-American candidates to white voters appeal by projecting wither a neutral position on issues perceived to have appeal to African-American voters as a group or by advancing inclusive social strategies without regard to race as a primary focus (Wilson 1990, cited in Albritton et.al 1996: 189). Most of the scholars that are involved with the study of this concept - McCormick and Jones (1993), Huey L. Perry (1996), Charles Hamilton (1973), Orey and Hicks (2007) to name a few - have based their studies on the political activity of the black community or more precisely, on those black political aspirants who have used this kind of method for their electoral campaigns.

Michael Fauntroy (2008) mentions that deracialization is an amorphous, never admitted political practice that forces African American candidates to remove virtually all evidence of race as a central part of his or her being. Since race is a delicate issue in America, scholars like Fauntroy thinks that this is an important strategy because even the most progressive of white voters tend to react sharply to those candidates who are open about their blackness and promote race-specific agendas. Why blacks need to deracialize their policies is a very important question. In the end, for electoral success blacks must appeal to white voters because this is an unavoidable circumstance. Blacks cannot win without white votes if they want to



move beyond majority black jurisdictions or rather, for greater success in bigger political arenas. But then again, one can raise the question of whether deracialization alone can lead to black political success in larger political arena.

The theoretical and practical significance of deracialization as a concept relates to its ability to explain the increase in the number of black elected officials in districts and jurisdictions that are not predominantly black and in which campaign strategies and rhetoric are not racially centred (Oden 1996: 47-48). This was somewhat proven true by the 1989 November elections in the US that saw a rise in the election of black candidates propagating deracialized campaign strategy with some of them winning from majority white community. This led to the prominence of the concept of deracialization. Most of the elected officials like L. Douglas Wilder (Governor of Virginia), David Dinkins (Mayor of New York City), Chester Jenkins (Mayor of Durham, North Carolina) and Norman Rice (Mayor of Seattle) were able to win in a majority white jurisdiction. The political tactic that these officials implied was based on race neutral policies. They advocated these policies as they were running in majority white jurisdictions where they could not bank only on the black community for their success. They had to garner enough white votes and for this they had to bring out policies in which the white community would feel that their positions have not been threatened or they would be disadvantaged if they elect the candidate. They therefore had to minimise their support for race specific policies but at the same time they also could not stray too far away from these policies as they also had to prove their credibility to their community.

In support of this, scholars like Harris (2009) mentions that black candidates running before majority or near majority white constituencies have to adopt campaign strategies that deemphasize their race because of the fear that white voters would be turned off by policy positions that steered too closely to black interests. This deemphasizing of one's own race for political gain is a deracialized strategy. Mostly, these strategies propagate racial unity and public policies that appeal to all citizens as a way to appease white voters' concerns that black candidates would be too strong in their support of race-specific policies. According to Perry (1996), the election of L. Douglas Wilder and Carol Moseley-Braun demonstrate that blacks can win elective office to important statewide political offices. Especially Wilder and Troy Carter's

election (Louisiana State Representative in the 102d District) has been considered as important milestones because they demonstrate that blacks can successfully utilize the deracialization strategy in the South. Perry (1996) mentions in his work that this is very crucial because deracialization is predicated on a number of whites being fair-minded enough to respond positively to universal appeals by black candidates. It is logical to assume that such white voters are in shorter supply in the South, given that the most severe oppression of black by whites in the United States occurred in the South (Perry 1996: 194).

Llorens et.al (1996) have stated that according to Jones and Clemons, there are three important strategies of deracialization that candidates must propagate which are: candidates must adopt positions on timely issues with strong cross-race appeal, to use political style that is non-threatening and reassuring to white voters and finally, the campaign strategy to mobilize the electorate which must be free of overt racial appeals (Llorens et.al 1996: 111-112). Therefore, it is important for candidates from minority communities, especially the black community in this particular case, to use 'race-neutral' policies to advance a balanced political policy that would appeal to all the people. According to McCormick and Jones (1993), a deracialized political campaign affects the issues candidates stress, their mobilization tactics and the style of their campaigns. They have stressed that race-neutral policy is the safest for these black candidates especially if they contest in a majority or highly populated white community, that candidates should avoid public appeals to black community to avoid the risk of alienating the white electorate and that these candidates should project a reassuring image to the white electorate. To have more black elected officials, it is necessary for black candidates to succeed in majority white districts as all of them cannot contest from only majority black districts. However, these candidates cannot run in these majority white districts in a similar way as they run in the black districts. They must present themselves as non-threatening to the white community in order to succeed. Confronted with this reality, both scholars and political pundits have argued that new strategies such as deracialization are necessary in order for more black candidates to be successful in the future (Orey and Ricks 2007: 327).

Deracialization, therefore is seen as an important policy for political aspirants from the black community. Perry (1996) believes that deracialization is useful for

explaining black politics in the United States in the period since the presidential administration of Ronald Reagan. Black politics became more prominent after the Civil Rights Movement of America which happened during the 1960's and for a long time, black politics was characterised by protest and agitation movements with the black community fighting for full integration into mainstream politics, society and economy. However, to achieve these, political aspirants from the black community had to move beyond majority black jurisdiction as they had exhausted their electability in these districts. They had to come out from majority white districts as well and therefore, slowly, black political aspirants started contesting in these white dominated districts. This is exactly where new political policies such as deracialization started becoming important for black political aspirants and has led to the success of many black candidates as mentioned before.

However, one must take into account these questions as well – Can deracialization be solely responsible for the electoral success of many black candidates? Do blacks need to transcend their race for success especially at higher level of politics? And finally, can deracialization be considered as an analytical concept for explaining the changes in black politics? To some extent, we can say that deracialization has helped in the vast success of black candidates but there are also cases where deracialization has not helped in gaining political success. It is however necessary for black candidates to transcend their race when appealing to voters at the larger political forums because if they are too race-specific in their policies, they can end up alienating voters from other communities. Finally, deracialization can be one of the concepts that will explain changes in black politics as it is often used as a political tool by candidates though the concept may not be the only answer for these changes. Perry (1996) mentions that since its introduction into the black politics subfield of political science in 1989, the concept of deracialization has undergone substantial scrutiny to determine its theoretical and empirical value. Further, Perry (1996) believes that deracialization has been an elusive concept but that it has begun to take on form and substance because it has been examined in a substantial number of elections over its recent scholarly history.

Using deracialization solely for the purpose of gaining white votes can have negative effects for black candidates. Minimizing their race to such an extent that they ignore

their commitment to their own community can have a backlash to their campaign, with their own people ending up not voting for them. So for executing deracialization successfully, black candidates have to appeal white voters with race-neutral policies which will at the same time be acceptable to black voters. Perry (1996) said that black candidates must adhere to a fine line between a successful non-racial appeal to white voters while at the same time not ignoring and alienating black voters. Black candidates therefore must know how to keep balance when they appeal to voters from different communities. From this explanation of deracialization let us now move on to how Obama deals with the issue of race in his political career.

Obama and the Issue of Race:

Much of Obama's appeal is his ability to transcend race (Clayton 2007: 54). This is visible in his campaigns not only for the presidency but also during his senatorial campaigns of 2000 and 2004 as well as the many speeches he has made. He has always been cautious of treading on the issue of race. Since he is a candidate from the black community, race is something which he cannot simply ignore to appeal to white voters as it can cause him huge political damage in the support that he gets from his own community. This therefore makes it all the more interesting to study the policy that Obama choose to follow when it comes to appealing voters for his political success both from the whites and minorities alike. Much of the analyses of his political strategy will be done by looking at his campaign speeches and the books that he has written, notably *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*.

Race is a factor that Obama cannot escape from. As we know, Barack Hussein Obama was born of a white mother from Kansas and a black father from Africa who came to study in the US. Judging by his appearance he is as black as any black American, but many times his race is a subject of question and controversy. Even though he considers himself to be part of the African-American community, that fact that his father was not an American citizen has often led many from the black community to consider him a bit alien to the community. This is because they believed that he does not have a sense of belonging and loyalty as much as those whose fathers and forefathers had borne the brunt of slavery and struggled for their rights in America. And

to add to this, Obama grew up in Hawaii under the care of his white grandparents during much of the Civil Rights period when blacks in the mainland had to struggle tremendously.

Even though Obama clearly accepts being a victim of racial loyalty from his own community because of his parents and his up-bringing, he however wants to highlight the fact that he too faces all the racial abuses like any other blacks. In *The Audacity of Hope*, he recounts his experiences on how security guards kept on tailing him in department stores; how he was tossed a car key by white couples outside a restaurant while he was waiting for a valet; police cars pulling him over for no apparent reasons and others. In his own words, “I know what it’s like to have people tell me I can’t do something because of my color, and I know the bitter swirl of swallowed-back anger (Obama 2006: 276).” Obama believes that in order to see race relation clearly one must look at the world on a split screen, view America as it is to acknowledge the sins of the past and the challenges of the present without becoming trapped in cynicism or despair. This clearly shows that Obama does not favour one to go on dwelling on the pains that racism has inflicted on the African-American community and keep on blaming others for their condition, but instead he urges people to move on from this and try to bring changes that will be beneficent to all (Obama 2006: 276).

Even though it was as early as his stay in Indonesia that Obama started to question about his race, it was in his high school years that Obama had to struggle with his racial identities. As Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) put it, “Compounding with his alienation, his African-American friends did not consider him to be completely one of them, charging that he had to learn how to be black from books (Dupuis and Boeckelman 2008: 3).” During his works as a community organiser in Chicago, Obama witnessed the conditions of many poor people especially the blacks. It was from this that he started to realise the slow pace of change and the many obstacles that stood in the way of his progressive vision. These experiences led him to realize the ineffability of the concept of the common good and that conflict and differing world view’s are the essence of politics (Dupuis and Boeckelman 2008: 4). However, he soon learned to appreciate and realise the importance of the small victories that were achieved and this helped him develop a pragmatic approach to politics which he has executed successfully many times in his political career. By this point in his life,

Obama had a keen understanding of the role that race could play in politics (Sammon 2007).

In his book, *Dreams from My Father*, Obama wrote, “People were satisfied so long as you were courteous and smiled and made no sudden moves. They were more than satisfied; they were relieved – such a pleasant surprise to find a well mannered young black man who didn’t seem angry all the time” (Obama 1995: 94-95). Obama understood the tactics that white politicians used, that is, using race as a limiting factor for black candidates by portraying black rage which always decide the votes of many white folks. Unlike black conservatives, Obama openly acknowledged his personal debt to the sacrifice made by martyrs and activists of the civil rights movement. Yet he also spoke frequently about the need to move beyond the divisions of the sixties, to seek common ground, and a post-partisan politics of hope and reconciliation (Marable in Marable and Clarke ed. 2009: 5). He mostly preached about the need to have racial equality in America and that both the whites and the minorities have equal responsibilities to bring that change.

Barack Obama became a political sensation of the Democratic Party when he gave a speech at the July 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston, Massachusetts that appealed to Americans to create unity across racial lines and party lines. He was at this time a candidate for the US Senate from Illinois and was the third African-American to deliver a speech at a major political party convention. This speech made Obama a household name in the Democratic Party and won the hearts of the American public. Soon he started campaigning for Democratic candidates all over America. The speech that he gave on that fateful day in July had him saying:

Now even as we speak, there are those who are preparing to divide us, the spin masters, the negative ad peddlers who embrace the politics of anything goes. Well, I say to them tonight, there is not a liberal America and a conservative America — there is the United States of America. There is not a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America — there’s the United States of America (Obama 2004: Democratic National Convention Keynote Address, Boston, Massachusetts).

Further encouraging the people to build the notion of hope, he also said, “In the end, that's what this election is about. Do we participate in a politics of cynicism, or do we participate in a politics of hope? (Obama 2004).” This speech challenged the people

of America to work together in unity and have hope for better things, that within the many divisions, they were united under America. In his own words, “Hope in the face of difficulty, hope in the face of uncertainty, the audacity of hope: In the end, that is God's greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation, a belief in things not seen, a belief that there are better days ahead (Obama 2004).”

On the campaign trail, Barack Obama used his racial background in a way that would appeal to voters of all races, mentioning that his father was from Kenya and his mother from Kansas (Dupuis and Boeckelman 2008: 80). When appealing the African-American community, Obama approached the issue of race by putting them in context of broader themes and emphasized on burning policy like jobs, education and health care which are the most important issues that are faced by the community. Throughout his senatorial campaign, he tried to infuse in all individuals that it was their own responsibility to address social problems and that everyone must work together to overcome these problems, to move beyond the issues of race, religion and parties to make a change. Even in his 2008 nomination acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention on August 28 in Denver, Colorado, Obama voiced out the need to work together in spite of the differences prevalent in the society. He said:

Instead, it is that American spirit, that American promise, that pushes us forward even when the path is uncertain; that binds us together in spite of our differences; that makes us fix our eye not on what is seen, but what is unseen, that better place around the bend. That promise is our greatest inheritance. It's a promise I make to my daughters when I tuck them in at night and a promise that you make to yours, a promise that has led immigrants to cross oceans and pioneers to travel west, a promise that led workers to picket lines and women to reach for the ballot. And it is that promise that, 45 years ago today, brought Americans from every corner of this land to stand together on a Mall in Washington, before Lincoln's Memorial, and hear a young preacher from Georgia speak of his dream. The men and women who gathered there could've heard many things. They could've heard words of anger and discord. They could've been told to succumb to the fear and frustrations of so many dreams deferred. But what the people heard instead – people of every creed and color, from every walk of life – is that, in America, our destiny is inextricably linked, that together our dreams can be one (Obama 2008a: Nomination Acceptance Speech at the Democratic Convention, Colorado).

Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) have mentioned that Obama is a racially complex person, which allows him to transcend some cultural constraints. This stands true for many reasons. Because of his colour, he is a part of the African-American and

belongs to the minority community. This, therefore, gives him the edge over white candidates in the minority community. But at the same time, because of his upbringing and his education, he stands out amongst other minority candidates and also with his pragmatic, universal approach on things, he is welcomed by the white community as well. Whites are not as suspicious of him as they are of other candidates especially from the African-American community who are race-specific in their approach. As Clayton (2007) puts it, "Obama has a charismatic style that connects with people and rises above racial stereotypes." His great oratory skills also make him a powerful speaker who can draw attention easily.

Because of the alienation he felt in the black community during his teenage years and of the need to constantly show whites that he was not like the 'angry-black man', Obama acquired a managed, self-control attitude and made use of it as his great political tool. At the same time, he also displays genuine comfort to whites because of his close relationship with his mother and grandparents. Goldstein (2008) stated that this is the bedrock of his ability to cross over, and by now it has become an ability to connect across all lines, including ideological ones. His experiences during his growing up years had taught him well on how to work with people of all races.

Obama is a member of the post-civil rights generation of African-American politicians and is not identified with the leaders such as Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton, who may be polarising to white voters (Clayton 2007). He is identified as such because Obama propagates policies which are essentially race-neutral. He is also equated with black politicians such as Douglas L. Wilder, Andrew Young, David Dinkins and others who became famous after their elections to local and state elections with most of them being successful from majority white districts. Ifill (2009) mentions that it is Obama's trademark to talk about race in a subtle manner and play safe with all his audiences be it the whites, blacks or other minorities. When given the chance to talk about race in the ways most expected to hear, he resisted. Race was worth talking about, he thought, but only in the context of broader issues. You would never catch this black man with his fist in the air (Ifill 2009: 53). In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama said:

In a sense I have no choice but to believe in this vision of America. As a child of a black man and a white woman, someone who was born in the racial melting pot of Hawaii, with a sister

who's half Indonesian but who's usually mistaken for Mexican or Puerto Rican, and a brother-in-law and a niece of Chinese descent, with some blood relatives who resemble Margaret Thatcher and others who could pass for Bernie Mac, so that family get-together over Christmas take on the appearance of a UN General Assembly meeting. I've never had the option of restricting my loyalties on the basis of race, or measuring my worth on the basis of tribe (Obama 2006: 274).

All this however do not suggest that Obama denies his race. He simply does not dwell on the matter unless called for. Obama and his advisers decided early that he was not going to win the presidency by playing up his race (Ifill 2009: 54). Their main target was those voters who would be suspicious or distrustful of him because of his race and reckon that those who would be drawn to his biography were anyways going to vote for him. Therefore, it became a necessity for Obama to embrace his biracial identity selectively so that he could win enough votes to bring him success. Ifill (2009) stated that he had to integrate the tactical with the strategic, reaching out to some voters without alienating others, and change the face of black politics altogether. He did this in part by crafting his persona and his speeches to appeal to all listeners. Obama strongly believes that the gap that currently exists in the American society today between the minorities and the whites must be closed out. For this, he believes that it is the responsibility of the minorities as individuals and groups as much as it is the government's responsibility.

In his interview by Henry Louis Gates Jr. on the election of Obama, William Julius Wilson (American Sociologist) talked of his first meeting with Obama in 1996 and said:

I found him very engaging, and I found that his message really resonated with me because he was talking about coalition building, and the need to address issues that would pull people together. And as I listened to him, I was thinking that he fully recognised the political importance of generating a sense of interdependence, where groups come to recognize that they can't achieve their goals without the help of other groups. That's the recipe for successful coalition building (Gates Jr. 2009: 18).

This clearly shows that Obama highly favoured working together irrespective of groups, community, race or religion. This has been Obama's popular political tool. As Marable (2009) puts it, "Obama's great strength is his ability to discuss controversial and complex issues in a manner that conveys the seeking of consensus, or common

ground” (Marable and Clarke ed. 2009: 6). Though some may assume that he is a candidate in search of white votes for political success, this must not be assumed as his sole motive. If we look at any of his campaign speeches, he always voice out this message, that one needs to move beyond race, religion and any other sort of divisions prevalent in the American society and politics in order to achieve more progress and development. So this clearly suggests that Obama truly feels the need go beyond race, colour and religion to make America great. This racial balancing act is hardly unknown to black professionals, but for Obama it is not just a campaign strategy. It is the product of a lifelong struggle, vividly described in his memoir *Dreams From My Father* (Goldstein 2008: 54). Even in his run for the presidency, Obama had to overcome many obstacles with race becoming a more sensitive issue after the Rev. Wright controversy which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter. Reviewing on Obama’s speech tackling the Rev. Wright controversy on the issue of race, his campaign manager, David Plouffe said,

Our candidate was living up to our expectations not just for him, but for any leader. Instead of talking down to our country or ducking one of our nation’s toughest issues, he wrapped himself in it, took a step back and tried to give us all some context. His goal was not simply to mitigate political damage, but to try and raise our discourse (Plouffe 2009: 213).

One of the most important messages that Obama used for his 2008 presidential campaign was the message of change. Obama weaves the professed ideals of America with the practiced realities of America, constructing a concise vision of the problem of race relations in America (Stuckey et.al 2010: 423). Concerning the issue of race in particular, Obama envisions a future in which identity would no longer be made solely on the basis of race. He addressed the issue of race through the problems of education, welfare, jobs, health care, the economy and other problems faced by the American public some of which are hardly race specific. He asked the people of America to resolve these problems by closing the divide between the races that is prevalent in the American society.

What can be deduced from all of this is that Obama never used race-specific policies to appeal to voters. He always makes his appeals universal in theme by including everyone to participate in the development of America. Even when dealing with the African-American community, he made sure that the legacies of the civil rights

leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, John Lewis and others will be interpreted by the black community in such a way that blacks will learn to integrate themselves with other groups and work in harmony to improve the lives of not just their community but rather all those who are just as under-privileged as they are. Therefore, Obama's message is clear and simple. He wants blacks to move on from the pains of slavery and Jim Crow laws and take responsibilities on their shoulders so that they can move towards more progress. He said:

The profound mistake of Reverend Wright's sermons is not that he spoke about racism in our society. It's that he spoke as if our society is static; as if no progress has been made; as if this country – a country that has made it possible for one of its own members to run for the highest office in the land and build a coalition of white and black, Latino and Asian, rich and poor, young and old – is still irrevocably bound to a tragic past. But what we know – what we have seen – is that America can change. That is true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope – the audacity of hope – for what we must achieve tomorrow (Obama 2008b: A More Perfect Union Speech, Constitution Centre Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.).

At the same time, even though he acknowledged to the whites that while there is progress in race relations, there is still so much to be done on their part as well to achieve true equality. He wants the white community to no longer be prejudiced and distrustful of minorities especially blacks and instead learn to trust them so that successful interdependence can be built; that America can be more powerful through this. Obama also wants the whites to acknowledge that discriminations and injustices towards blacks are still prevalent and visible in America till today even though much progress has been made. He does not want the white community to feel satisfied with the status-quo in racial relation as is prevalent now in America. Obama wants the white community to take equal responsibility in improving racial relations and challenge them to move beyond racial-stereotyping especially towards blacks and instead build trust towards each other so that every unprivileged person will be uplifted and that the real American dream can be realised. Challenging the white community, he said:

In 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 – current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past

– real and must be addressed. Not just with words, but with deeds (Obama 2008b: A More Perfect Union Speech, Constitution Centre Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).

For testing how far racial equality has been achieved in American society, Obama strongly feels the need to take into account both how far the American public has come as well as how far they still need to go to achieve racial equality. Obama is trying to promote unity and equality amongst races and is using this as his political tool to appeal voters across all racial lines.

Obama's Racial Attitude and Deracialization:

Finally, let us examine the concept of deracialization and Obama's policy on race to deduce whether they represent one similar issue or not. On a careful analysis of the term deracialization and Obama's policy on race, there is certain line of similarity. However, before coming into details of this similarity, first let us observe why it is important for candidates from minority communities, the black community in this particular case to transcend race for their success. Hajnal (2007) has written that prior to the election of black candidates, most white voters have little or no experience with black leadership. He further wrote that for this reason, many rely on racial stereotypes and past patterns in race relations to assess the likely consequences of a black candidate's victory (Hajnal 2007: 3). This therefore clearly shows that whites tend to fear that black candidates may favour only their community when victorious because they base their perception of black candidates on past experiences with blacks in general and hence this results in white voters not voting for a black candidate altogether. Especially to appeal to white voters, Harris (2009) has mentioned that black candidates running before majority or near majority white constituencies have to adopt campaign strategies that deemphasize their race due to the fear that white voters would be turned off by policy positions that steered too closely to black interests. This argument clearly shows that it for the reassurance of white voters that they would not be disadvantaged if they voted for black candidates that black candidates transcend race.

As traditional black politics that came out from the Civil Rights Movements sought to uplift the community through political forum, without experience under black

leadership, whites tend to be reluctant to elect black leaders as they fear that it can have serious political consequence which can be a disadvantage for the white community. Traditional black politics and white voters' perception however will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of this research. Anyhow, this perception soon changed as more blacks started getting elected not only at the local level but also at the state and national level politics. Like it has been mentioned before, the 1989 elections where numerous blacks got elected and most of them from majority white jurisdiction brought changes on the campaigning style of black politicians and black politics took on a new form.

Since blacks have exceeded their electability in majority black districts, many aspiring black leaders have to go beyond their community and win from other districts where whites are the majorities. Thus, for their success, black candidates have to reassure the white voters that they are not going to be partial in their ruling if they get elected and for this to work, they need to show it in their campaigns; that all their developmental projects will be beneficent to the community, district or state as a whole and not biased towards any particular community. To achieve this goal, they need to employ race neutral or deracialized policies with lots of emphasis on the importance of working together as a group for the benefit of all. Stuckey et al. (2010) believe that candidates who can claim to be candidates who "happen to be" minorities rather than minority candidates have a far better chance of electoral success than those who are limited to minority status.

It is therefore important that black candidates transcend their race for greater political success. In order to achieve this, black candidates must make sure that they focus on issues that are more important than race while at the same not ignoring the problems of race. They must learn to integrate the issue of race with other social problems in order to show that they intend to solve these issues with no bias towards race. One important thing can be identifying oneself first as an American and make race a secondary identity. They must try to balance their commitments as neutral and unbiased as they can. In case of situations where it is necessary for them to speak of their minority status, they must try to integrate it within the broad parameters of national identity in a notion of reinforcing that identity. They must present themselves

in such a way as may be appealing to voters of all race or rather, the white vote in particular.

This however can raise several questions. The most controversial can come from the minority candidates' own community with their people questioning the extent of their loyalty and commitment to their community and whether their motives in minimizing their race when campaigning will mean abandonment of their commitment to their own community when elected. This is a very important question that a minority candidate cannot afford to ignore. They must minimise their race without alienating themselves from their own community. The other can come from the white community of which the first issue will be whether the race-neutral policies advocated by black politicians can really be executed by them once they are elected to office. Even Obama is cautious on this issue; he believes that black leaders need to appreciate the legitimate fears that may cause some whites to resist affirmative action (Obama 2006: 82). Apart from this, one central problem that can arise for candidates from minority communities is on how well the candidate can balance his minority status and mould it in such a way to make national appeals that represents the whole nation. Most important is a political context that allows candidates to frame issues in ways that minimize the relevance of their minority status (Stuckey et al. 2010:426).

If a minority candidate is well known for his or her strong support of the causes that is associated with the group he or she belongs to, then this comes directly to his or her disadvantage because it makes it difficult for the candidate to set aside the minority status. One good example can be Jesse Jackson Sr. As we know Jackson Sr. was a staunch advocate of traditional black politics and was well known for his fight against the injustices towards the black community. So, when he fought for presidential nomination from the Democratic Party both in 1984 and 1988, he could not garner enough white support as whites were in doubt whether he could really lead the nation without being biased towards his community. Even though he came up with the 'Rainbow Coalition' during his run for Democratic nomination seat, it did nothing to help his cause as he was already known as the man too strongly attached to the black cause. White voters' perception is therefore very important for any minority candidate to take into account.

Coming now to Obama, a careful analysis of his stand on the issue of race clearly shows that he does not follow race-specific policies which therefore is a reflection of the many black politicians mentioned before who also do not follow race-specific policies in their campaigns. Even when specifically taking the 2008 election, scholars have mentioned that Barack Obama – the candidate from a minority community which have famously struggled against racial injustice – himself avoided treading directly on racial issues (Marable 2009: 1, 6, 10; Sinclair-Chapman and Price 2008: 740). From his speeches and writings mentioned before, it is also clear that Obama wants equality and reconciliation amongst all races. He always makes it a point that for any changes that must be made, all people must be involved. So when he appeals to black people, Obama urged them to take responsibilities on their shoulders and move on from the pains of the civil rights and Jim Crow days. He wants them to be more pragmatic in their dealing with racial injustices.

When discussing the 2008 presidential election in particular, scholars like Harris (2009), Ford (2009), Marable (2009), Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) and many others have categorised Obama's policy as similar to the new black politicians who no longer make appeal on narrow racial solidarities and who have moved on from traditional black-centred politics. Obama's "race-neutral" approach is a campaign strategy that minority candidates have been using since the 1980s (Harris 2009: 43). And this race-neutral policy is what Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) have also claimed Barack Obama represents; a new age of African-American public officials where Obama is the face of the next generation considering the background of black politicians that has changed dramatically (Dupuis and Boeckelman 2008: 77).

Ford (2009) has particularly mentioned that Obama's political strategies reflected those of the new, younger black politicians who have made it possible for blacks to forge new strategies to win election. Their success suggests that white racism is no longer the insuperable barrier to black success that it has been for all of American history and that the old style of black politics which relied heavily on racial bloc voting and influence peddling within the black community may be obsolete (Ford 2009: 4). In attributing the importance of the successes of these new black politicians, Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) have also made the argument that these candidates not only showed that African-Americans could win, but that they also provided a

blueprint for doing so which they believed helped Obama's cause (Dupuis and Boeckelman 2008: 78).

Manning Marable (2009) has also argued that Obama followed the policy as these new types of black politicians by minimizing the issue of race and instead presenting race-neutral politics. This was in part a strategy brought up by his campaign team. Early on in their deliberation process, the Obama pre-campaign group recognized that most white Americans would never vote for a black candidate but would rather embrace and vote for a remarkable, qualified presidential candidate who happened to be black (Marable 2009: 6). In relation to this, Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) have also written, "Clearly, the Obama campaign was aware of the need for biracial appeals (Dupuis and Boeckelman 2008: 76)." Then we also have Smith and King (2009) making an argument in support of this, that using 'race-neutral' policies in his campaign was the best option for Obama. This, therefore clearly suggests that deracialization was considered by Obama and his campaign team that it would be the best policy for him to appeal to all voters, aiming the white vote in particular.

From the arguments given by the scholars above, it is certain that Obama's policy is race-neutral in nature. They have all argued that this strategy was important for Obama to win the election. They have also mentioned that Obama's political strategy is a reflection of the younger black leaders who were elected in majority after the 1980's. And studies on the elections of these black politicians have suggested that they have imparted a political strategy called deracialization. As explained in the first part of this chapter, deracialization suggests executing political strategies that minimize one's race or minority status for a broader appeal to the white voters while at the same time building support from their own community as well.

Looking at Obama's take on racial issues, we also find that he is very cautious in dealing with the issue. Obama weaves the professed ideals of America with the practised realities of America, constructing a concise vision of the problem of race relations in America (Stuckey et al. 2010). Even though he strongly advocates that he belongs to the African-American community, he does not make his appeal through racial issues. Perhaps the most significant departure is that the Obama campaign promises a version of race transcendent leadership that is independent of the black

community (Sinclair-Chapman and Price 2008: 740). He advocates policies which rather look like bridges for closing the huge racial divide of America. He is totally different from past black leaders who are staunch followers of the protest politics that came out after the Civil Rights movements of the 1960's. He does not want blacks to keep on blaming whites for their wrong doings while doing nothing themselves to address the problems. He believes and strongly voiced out in most of his speeches and writings, that it is time for the black community to move on from this and take the responsibility to bring change in the community.

From the analyses of his speeches and writings, one can see similar patterns of this concern running. This shows that Obama is challenging the black community to come out and fight for their rightful equality instead of waiting for whites to give it to them. He did this in a very clever manner. He took on the legacies of past black leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and tried to infuse their teachings in such a way that it would be interpreted as having a universal theme, challenging blacks to put these teachings into practice in a way that is appropriate and feasible in today's American politics. Instead of talking solely on the racial prejudice and inequalities faced by the black community alone, he made sure that these problems will be seen as those not prevalent only in the black community but every poor district of America.

Obama's great tactic is on how he moulds the black issue into a broader social issue. This way, he does not alienate the black community wholly and at the same time, it does not make whites suspicious of his motives either. While challenging blacks to be more pragmatic and efficient in their cause, he also make appeals to the white community to make more amendments and not be satisfied with the current racial condition of America as many whites seem to feel satisfied with the many progress that has been made on this issue. He believes that complete racial equality is yet to be attained and that everyone irrespective of what race he or she belongs to must contribute and work together to bring that change.

A careful study of Obama's policies shows that he always voice out the importance of working together and that no matter how much divided people may be, in the end that it is important to be 'one' America. So we can see that he does not favour any race-specific policy. He hardly ever talks of race though at the same time not ignoring the

matter as well. He is good at minimizing his race to appeal to both black and white voters not mentioning the other minorities. Obama knows well that race can be a limiting factor for black candidates by portraying black rage which always decides the votes of many white folks. Therefore, unlike most black conservatives, Obama openly acknowledged his personal debt to the sacrifices made by martyrs and activists of the civil rights movement but at the same he also makes it a point to mention that the progress made in racial relations throughout the years must not be neglected or ignored.

Also, Obama has made great use of his mixed heritage to make a broad appeal to all Americans. He used it as an example to show that he does not favour any race in particular, that he is comfortable with any person of any race. He also used it to portray his struggle in finding his identity and how each person in his life has contributed in making him a better person. Through his experiences and struggles, he wants to show people that he is not in a position to favour anyone in particular; that everyone deserves a better life than the one they are leading and that he would work towards achieving this. In all his campaign speeches, it can clearly be seen that Obama always talks about fighting problems prevalent in American society by highlighting various peoples' life accounts irrespective of their races to show that no race in particular is escaping these problems.

Obama mostly avoid treading directly on the issue of race as he knows too well how being too sensitive on racial issues can cause political damage especially to blacks and addressed the matter directly only when so required. He made other issues confronting America like education, healthcare, the economy and others as issues to be addressed by working together and within the context of these issues he would infuse the problems of race. Thus, to white voters he appears 'safe' and not like other minority candidates who try to push policies that directly address the issue of race. At the same time, since he does not neglect racial problems either, he is well accepted by his own community.

Smith and King (2009) have mentioned that Obama sought to build a new, broader coalition that blended those Americans who predominantly favour colour-blind policies but who do not want to see real material racial progress and can tolerate a few

race-conscious measure, with those who think substantial race-conscious measures are needed, but who are willing to see them put on the back burner if progress is indeed being achieved through other means. He did this, for the most part, simply by not talking about race and by minimizing its likely impact on the election, thereby permitting colour-blind and race-conscious advocates to interpret his rhetorical emphases on both unity and change in terms congenial to them (Smith and King 2009: 31). He neither minimized the persistence of racial inequalities nor repudiated all race conscious measures, but his emphasis remained on programs, principles, and purposes designed to further the shared values and goals of all Americans (Smith and King 2009: 32).

Obama's great success in executing this policy is that both the black community and the white community accept his message in a good way. Harris (2009) has mentioned that majority of blacks (52%) perceived his message to them on taking more responsibility as not an attempt to appeal white voters but rather an important wake-up call for the community while significant number of blacks (25%) also believed it as a message equally important to both the blacks and the whites. Clearly, a majority of blacks thought that the messages of personal responsibility from Obama were not an attempt to score points with the white voters and an additional quarter thought that Obama's message served dual purposes, as a way to communicate to both blacks and whites (Harris 2009: 44). Also, by downplaying his race using deracialized policy, Obama made white voters feeling less threatened about voting for a black candidate. So either ways, Obama succeeded in attracting both the white votes and the black votes as well though he received far greater votes from the black community than from the white community. Even though arguments can be made that race-neutral policies can cost votes from their own community for black candidates, in the case of Obama, it did not bring down his support from his community because as was clearly evident in the 2008 presidential election, he garnered as much as 95 percent of the total black votes (Philpot et al. 2009).

Assessing from all the arguments made by scholars mentioned before and from the campaign speeches and writings of Obama, it can be concluded that Obama did indeed followed a deracialized policy for campaigning. Though the way he minimized his race may be different from other black candidates who have followed deracialized

strategies, his race-neutral approach and his universal theme for addressing problems associated with race are indeed a way of deracializing. If a minority candidate minimizes his or her race in order to appeal to larger voters, it can be concluded as deracialization. Though scholars may differ on using the terms race-neutral, racial transcendence, mainstreaming or post-racial, they can somehow be brought under the concept of deracialization as all these concepts are about following policies where race is made secondary to other problems but not neglecting its problems either, where appeal is made under broader themes to include all people.

Chapter 3

The Election 2008: Issue of Race in the Primaries and the General Election

In this election she (Ann Nixon Cooper) touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change.

- Barack Obama, November 4, 2008

The Presidential Election of 2008 in the US stands as an important and distinguishing milestone in the politics of America. As we know, for the first time in the history of the United States of America, a major party fielded a candidate from the minority community and that too from the black community and he even went on to win the presidency. This, no doubt, raised lots of issues concerning racial relations in America. In the previous chapter, a discussion has been made on Obama's policy towards the issue of race in his campaigns for electoral politics. In this chapter, we will be looking at various stages where racial issues became important issues in the election and how race was used as a campaign tool by the candidates from the primaries to the general election. Also, the role that race played in the voting pattern of people will be discussed in brief.

The election saw the increased turnout of voters from minority communities; remarkably noteworthy was the African-American community and a surge in young voters and women voters as well. In all these categories of voters, Obama won majority votes. He also managed to win states which had voted Republican in the previous elections. Obama's victory has been claimed by many scholars as being heralded successfully by a number of events such as the economic depression, the Iraq war and an unpopular president's unsuccessful domestic and foreign policies of which

Obama offered 'change' which was exactly what the people of America at that time wanted. Even though these factors played important role in the election of Obama, the issue of race also became a very important factor which cannot be neglected even though the candidates themselves appeared to be race-neutral in their campaigns. Hill (2009) stated that the Obama presidential candidacy was confronted with a long, engrained history in which the race problematic has been played and that Obama entered national politics at a time when it was perceived that the period of overt racist public statements and actions had passed from the scenes and any residual cases of such were anomalies (Hill 2009:141). Let us now examine how race was brought up and used by the candidates from the primaries to the general election.

The Democratic Primaries and the Issue of Race:

Even though the Republican primaries is an important part of the 2008 presidential election, however, the Democratic primaries receives focus in this chapter because it is here that racial issue played a prominent role during the primaries as Barack Obama was fighting for nomination from this party. The Republican Party did not have such issues of significant importance on race relations during their nomination process and hence the present research avoids focussing on this. The nomination phase on the Democratic side was the most long-drawn-out affair since the primary became the dominant mode of nomination after the 1968 election (Niemi and Stanley 2010: 147). The Democratic Party started off with five people battling for nomination but eventually it became Obama and Hillary Clinton who finally battle out the nomination seat and Barack Obama won. The focus of this research here is not who won which primary and caucus but rather those periods where race became an issue and whether this came as an advantage or disadvantage for Obama.

A close study of the speech given by Obama on 10th February 2007, when he announced his candidacy for the president of America shows that he did not mention about his race or its symbolism in his candidacy. This, however, is not surprising considering the fact that Obama hardly ever talks about race in particular reference to the African-American community as we have seen in the previous chapter. He follows a policy which tones down the essence of his race so that voters from all community

will not judge him as too sympathetic towards his own community. From early on in his campaign, Obama gained support from many liberal whites because of this policy, but this same policy made the black community to question whether he was 'black' enough for their support. He was even sharply criticized by prominent black leaders like Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson for not propagating enough agenda concerning the black issue.

As the Democratic caucuses and primaries began, however, Obama quickly established the ability to win a surprisingly large share of whites' votes (Marable 2009: 8). The first Democratic primary was held in Iowa on January 3, 2008. Many were sceptical about Obama and to make matters worse, Iowa had little black population. But in a stunning triumph, Obama defeated Clinton and other Democratic challengers in the Iowa caucus, in January 2008, where blacks represented less than 2 percent of all voters (Marable and Mullings 2009: 627). This was an important event for Obama as it was to show whether his race-neutral policies would work amongst voters of all communities especially the white and black communities. Eventually, it was proven that Obama could win against two famous white candidates, Hillary Clinton and John Edwards and could get support both from the white and black voters. Obama won the white votes by 33 percent and as much as 72 percent from the black community voted for him (New York Times 2008a). This clearly shows that both the blacks and the whites were willing to support him even though he played safe with both the communities and did not show any favouritism towards either. Also, the result built a better image for Obama, that he was also someone who was worth considering.

The first issue of race came after this primary was conducted. After her defeat in the Iowa primary, Hillary Clinton made a remark that suggested that she was the one who could bring about changes while Obama was only a good speaker when she commented, "Dr. Kings dream began to be realised when President Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act....it took a president to get it done (Wheaton 2008)." This remark proved to be a disadvantage for Hillary especially in her relation with the black community as the comment was taken by the blacks as a gesture that suggested that coloured people were not yet ready to take up such an important position, that Obama was merely a good speaker and that she would do a much better job in the top office.

This brought about resentment and much criticism for Clinton especially from the black community.

But Hillary was not alone on being considered as a racist. Comments made by Bill Clinton on the morning of New Hampshire primary was also criticized as racially charged (Fraser 2009: 169). His whole comments about Obama's win and especially his remark, "Give me a break. This whole thing is the biggest fairytale I've ever seen (Phillips 2008)," has been criticized by many people. Coming immediately after Hillary Clinton's comments on Dr. King and President Johnson, the issue of race was ignited once again as commentators asked whether Clinton's comments implied that Obama's historic candidacy was a "fairytale" (Fraser 2009: 169). Moving on to the New Hampshire primary, Obama lost the state to Hillary with a 36.5 percent to 39.1 percent of votes even though the polls that were taken before the votes were counted had predicted a win for Obama. Many scholars believe that the Bradley Effect had come into play. Before going further into the primaries, let us first give a brief explanation of the meaning of the Bradley Effect as this is an important factor when discussing elections in which not only blacks, but also minorities to some extent, are involved.

The Bradley Effect: This phenomenon has also been many times mentioned as similar to the Wilder Effect and is commonly considered when non-white candidates battle against white candidates in elections. According to Altman (2008), "The theory holds that voters have a tendency to withhold their leanings from pollsters when they plan to vote for a white candidate instead of a black one." What this means is that necessarily, when polls are conducted before elections, whites who do not want to show racial resentments often have the tendency to mislead pollsters by saying that they would vote for non-white candidates. However, when actual election results are declared, non-white candidates occasionally perform much worse than polls predicted. Therefore, if there is an assumption that a Bradley or Wilder Effect is in play, it means that non-white candidates perform much better in opinion polls than actual elections.

This phenomenon is named after Tom Bradley, an African-American mayor of Los Angeles who ran for election for the post of governor of California. Even though

opinion polls conducted before the election saw him as a favourite, he however ended up losing to his white opponent, George Deukmejian. Also in the 1989 Virginia gubernatorial election, Douglas Wilder had a nine-point lead before the election but won by less than one percentage point; hence, the Wilder Effect as is also commonly used. This effect is thus important when studying elections where whites and non-whites are the contenders and is an important part in studying the effect of race in elections. As such, the issue also cropped up many times during the primaries and the general election of 2008, with many scholars asking how far this phenomenon would play its role. The media was also in much hype about it with Carroll (2008) writing in CNN Politics, “Sen. Barack Obama has a sizable lead over Sen. John McCain, polls show, but those numbers could be deceiving if the ‘Bradley effect’ comes into play (Carroll 2008).” But in the end we can say that Obama outlived the Bradley Effect and he went on to win the Democratic nomination process and the general election.

Coming back to the primaries, the South Carolina primary became very important as the state holds significant black population. Demographically, the primary voters were 55 percent black and 43 percent white (New York Times 2008b). To many, Obama may look as having an advantage over Hillary, but this was not so, because Bill Clinton was popular amongst the black population of South Carolina. However, Bill Clinton did not seem to make the right moves. Todd and Gawiser (2009) mentions that, the more Bill campaigned; he kept tripping up on the racial front and seemed publicly to be too dismissive of Obama for many black voters. This caused the black vote to solidify for Obama in a way that even the Obama campaign didn’t expect (Todd and Gawiser 2009: 13). Obama won the state and as much as 78 percent of blacks voted for him (New York Times 2008c).

It was after this win that Obama’s opponents started to shift their portrayal of him as ‘not black enough’ to ‘too black’ by comparing him with Jesse Jackson when Bill Clinton made the comment that Obama ran a good campaign as Jesse Jackson did way back in 1984 and 1988 (Kornblut 2008). As Fraser (2009) puts it, the comments were largely criticized, since they appeared to minimize Obama’s win as a consequence of the high percentage of African Americans in the state. Further, connecting Obama with Jackson presented him as a race-based candidate rather than a postracial candidate (Fraser 2009: 171).

Racial controversy once again broke out after the Super Tuesday primaries were held in which states of Alabama, Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Utah voted. Although Clinton took the Latino vote in key states - California, New York and New Jersey, Obama won Hispanic voters in Connecticut (which has a similar Latino population to New York's) and made a strong showing with Latino voters in New Mexico — where close to 45 percent of the population considers itself Hispanic (Cook 2008). This shows that Obama was also very much capable of winning votes from other minority group.

Since the result of Super Tuesday could not declare the nominee for the Democratic Party, a televised debate was conducted. It was during this televised debate held by MSNBC on February 26, 2008 that another racial issue came out (msnbc.com 2011). During the debate, the moderator Tim Russert asked Obama whether he accepted the endorsement of Minister Louis Farrakhan who is famous for his anti-Semitism records. Obama's reply to this question can once again be considered as cautious and as race-neutral as possible. Obama made it clear that he did not support Farrakhan's anti-Semitic comments but that he could not censor Farrakhan even though he did not seek Farrakhan's support. While this question clearly shows that the race card has been played against Obama by testing whether he was willing to publicly denounce controversial black leaders who are considered as threats by whites as they are too strong in their support for black cause, his reply also clearly shows that Obama sticks to his campaign policy i.e. playing safe to appeal both the white and minority communities.

As the moderator pressed on with another question on whether Obama 'accepts' or 'rejects' Farrakhan's support, Obama once again deny using the word 'reject' which further pressed Russert to once again made comments about Farrakhan's record of anti-Semitism. At this point, Hillary interjected that Obama should reject point blank rather than denounce it. Obama's response was again smart and eloquent. He stated that he did not really find the difference about 'denounce' and 'reject' and that if Hillary believes that the word 'reject' is a much stronger word of the two, he gladly reject and denounce. Obama's rhetoric and use of words clearly shows his carefulness

of not becoming a victim of racialized politics so that he would be able to appeal all American voters:

After this incident, came another problem on racial issue for Obama when Geraldine Ferraro mentioned in an interview with a California newspaper that Obama was lucky to be in the position that he was in at that present time and that if Obama had been white or a woman of any colour, he would not be in that position (Seelye and Bosman 2008). The implication that Obama was enjoying electoral success because he is black struck many as ridiculous and shocking, particularly coming from such a prominent leader of the Democratic Party (Fraser 2009: 172). Mrs. Clinton later distanced herself from Ms. Ferraro's comments, telling The Associated Press that she did not agree with what Ms. Ferraro had said (Seelye and Bosman 2008). Ferraro stepped down as an advisor to the Clinton campaign but she continued to defend her remarks. It was, however, the March 2008 incident that was to be the most problematic for Obama.

The Rev. Wright Controversy and "A More Perfect Union": Video clips of Rev. Jeremiah Wright (pastor of Trinity Church attended by Obama) condemning the US as responsible for the 9/11 incident plus blaming the government as being responsible for spreading AIDS began to surface in early March 2008 and television channels aired them over and over again. Perhaps the most replayed clip from the Wright sermons was one in which the pastor proclaimed that instead of singing "God Bless America," black Americans should sing "God Damned America (Fraser 2008: 173)." Since Rev. Wright preached race-based messages, from early on, conservative groups of America had questioned Obama's relation with his pastor as Obama's policy is more of post-racial in theme. As this was the case, Obama tried to distance himself from his controversial pastor and even asked him to not to give the invocation at the announcement of his candidacy.

As these video clips began to be aired more frequently, it was not enough for Obama to simply distance himself from Rev. Wright as whites began to question whether he too would be influenced by these speeches as Obama had been a prominent member of the Trinity Church. The Obama campaign team realised that this could gravely damage the image of Obama and his chances of winning the nomination. Eventually, Obama came up with a speech entitled "A More Perfect Union" which was delivered

on March 18, 2008 in Philadelphia at the National Constitution Centre in which he addressed the issue of racial relations in America. For someone like Obama who has a mixed heritage, it is very difficult to get oneself not related with racial issues. If he courts only the whites, then he would lose votes from the black community and vice versa, he would lose his white support if he becomes too race-centric in his approach.

Thus, it was of extreme importance for Obama to address the Rev. Wright issue in a convincing manner which could be accepted by all and his 'A More Perfect Union' speech was just enough to convince sceptics that he indeed is not like past black political leaders who had favoured race-centric policies. According to Frank (2009), this speech sought to quell the controversy sparked by YouTube clips of his pastor, Jeremiah Wright of the Trinity United Church of Christ, condemning values and actions of the United States government. In this address, Obama crosses over the colour line with a rhetorical strategy designed to preserve his viability as a presidential candidate and in doing so, delivered a rhetorical masterpiece that advances the cause of racial dialogue and rapprochement (Frank 2009: 167).

In the speech, Obama first took on the very essence of the constitution of America i.e equality and freedom and how this essence was a clear opposite of America's history of slavery. Then he went on to voice out that his goal was a continuation of the march that was started during the civil rights movement; a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. He went on to give his own story as an example to voice out that no matter what race they belong to, it is possible for people to work and unite together as Americans as was given in his words, "But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts - that out of many, we are truly one (Obama 2008b)."

Obama then went on talking about how his campaign had been subjected by many people to be racial in its approach but that they have been unsuccessful. He then talked about Rev. Wright and his sermons; that many times he had heard his pastor preaching racial messages, that he knew very well the kind of man Rev. Wright is and that he does not support all these things that he preached, that he was no different to others who also disagree with the remarks of their pastors, rabbis or priests. He strongly voiced out that Rev. Wright represented a distorted view of America that was

wrong and divisive. Though he was very much against Rev. Wright's remarks, he justified himself on why he still remained a member of the church by saying that Rev. Wright had been an important part of his acceptance of faith, that he was more than a racialized preacher. He then mentions how could not distance himself from the pastor by saying:

“I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can my white grandmother - a woman who helped raise me, a woman who sacrificed again and again for me, a woman who loves me as much as she loves anything in this world, but a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed by her on the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe. These people are a part of me. And they are a part of America, this country that I love.”
(Obama 2008b: A More Perfect Union Speech, Constitution Centre Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).

This whole “A More Perfect Union” speech is about uniting America under one banner. Even though racial issues are still very much present in America, Obama mentions in this speech that America had moved ahead of the Civil Rights struggles and that blacks should no longer hold grudges of the Civil Rights Movements but move on while at the same time asking whites not to neglect the pains and struggles of the black community and must try to abandon their attitude of stereotyping blacks; that every citizen of America should stick together and make America a greater union as given in the Constitution of America.

Through this speech, Obama once again reaffirmed to his critics that he indeed is post-racial in his approach and that he is not like past black leaders who harbour hatred towards the white community while at the same time highlighting to the whites that the struggles of black people are still present and must not be ignored. His March 2008 race speech in Philadelphia was very well received, as he did his best to send the message that he viewed the race issue through the eyes of both black and white America (Todd and Gawiser 2009:12). A poll taken by the Pew Research Centre after this speech to see the reaction of people shows that 51 percent of voters rated him as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ in his handling of the Wright issue with 66 percent of Democrats, 48 percent whites and 75 percent of blacks giving him positive ratings (Pew Research Centre 2008).

Even though this speech was made to confront voters that they really need not worry about Rev. Wright and his comments and that it did not really affect Obama and his policy, the Pennsylvania primary was won by Hillary by a 54.6 percent over Obama's 45.4 percent with 60 percent whites voting and only 8 percent blacks voting (New York Times 2008d). And to make matters worse for Obama, Rev. Wright himself made comments about Obama's speech saying on an interview in PBS that Obama said 'what he had to say as a politician' (Bosman 2008). After this incident, Rev. Wright once again made comments about 9/11, the wrong doings of the American government and about Louis Farrakhan as he had done in the video-clips aired earlier that had compelled Obama to come out with the "More Perfect Union" speech. This incident finally made Obama to publicly distance himself from the pastor. He reacted by publicly severing ties with Wright in a press conference on April 29, 2008 (Zeleny 2008).

The Wright controversy became a big burden for Obama. It raised a platform for opponents to implicitly play the race-card against him, but much more than the opponent team taking advantage of it, it was the controversy that played the divisive role much on its own and for most of the time, Clinton and her team did not give comments about it except for one or two small remarks. Rather, the Wright issue left voters especially whites to question about Obama and his race-neutral policies, whether he was really committed to these or not and whether he really is different from past racially-centred black political leaders or not. Even though many critics were to be found concerning the way he handled the situation, polls as mentioned before showed that Obama had been taken seriously by most voters, that he was quite accepted by both blacks and whites.

Coming back to the primaries, Obama went on to win the North Carolina primary as was predicted in polls conducted beforehand since it had large black population. He however missed out the Idaho primary by a 1 percent vote to Hillary (Fraser2009). This win showed that Obama had not been as badly hit by the Wright controversy as was feared or rather his handling of the situation proved successful as voters did not stray away from him. As Fraser (2009) puts it, "As the results came in Tuesday night, Obama proved that he had been able to weather Wright's incendiary comments." What scholars like Fraser (2009) are trying to show is that, even though the Wright

controversy did manage to harm Obama's campaign, yet his "A More Perfect Union" message and later on, him denouncing Rev. Wright have helped to kill the anxiety and doubts of many white voters while at the same not losing the black vote either even though he was walking away from imminent black leaders. Their support for Obama also suggests that many black voters now want to move on from the pains of slavery and the civil rights movements, that they were ready to support race-neutral leaders like Obama to bring real change in their struggles.

Hillary Clinton went on to win the two primaries held in the month of May. On May 13, Clinton won West Virginia with 67 percent of the vote, and on May 20, she won Kentucky with 65 percent (New York Times 2008e). But this was not a surprise as these two states had large white-working class population. As the Democratic primary came close to an end and Senator Obama maintained a consistent but a close lead over Senator Clinton, it became clear that decisions made prior to the primary season regarding Michigan and Florida would need to be addressed again, particularly as the two states would be important in the general election (Fraser 2009: 177). These two states had been stripped of their delegates since they held their primaries before February 5, 2008, the date set by the Democratic National Committee (DNC) as this was to decide which candidate would eventually emerge as the Democratic candidate. Finally, the decision of the DNC was given after a long and impassioned meeting on May 31, 2008, when the Rules and Bylaws Committee comprising supporters of both candidates decided to assign each delegate in Florida and Michigan half a vote (Falcone 2008).

By the evening of June 3, 2008, Obama had reached the number needed to secure the Democratic nomination which is 2,118 delegates. This was the day the South Dakota and Montana primaries were held and throughout the day a large number of superdelegates started to publicly endorse Obama. For the first time in the history of America, an African-American had clinched the nomination for a major party in the US. This created much hype and frenzy in the country and the media largely emphasized on the fact that history had been made with a black man being selected to represent a major party in the general election.

Again what becomes noteworthy after this event is that, when Obama gave a speech in St. Paul, Minnesota, he once again did not mention about his race and how symbolic it was for the black community. Here Obama once again emphasized on the post-race issues. Even though Hillary Clinton did not immediately gave her concession speech, she was soon urged by the Democratic leadership, with many of her supporters included, to suspend her campaign as Obama had reached the number of delegates needed to secure the nomination. Also, there was great eagerness in the Democratic camp to unite the Democratic which had somewhat become divided because of the battle between the two candidates. Clinton finally gave her concession speech on June 7, 2008, at the National Building in Washington D.C and Obama officially accepted the Democratic nomination on August 28, 2008 at the Democratic Convention.

The selection of Obama as the Democratic nominee was overwhelming for African-Americans in particular as no one had managed to achieve as high as he did from the community. Many were very optimistic about race relations in America because many whites had also supported Obama which to some showed that racial stereotyping and prejudice have started to become a thing of the past. While many others became more cautious, especially from the African-American community, because they fear that this might signify to whites that racial relation has improved and that it is no longer necessary to address the issue when there is still many more things to resolve. Let us now look at the following table to see how well Obama performed amongst the black and white voters in the Democratic primary in comparison with Clinton's votes:

Table 1: Result for Obama and Clinton during the Democratic Primaries:

State	Black Voters		White Voters		Race Gap *	Black % In State	Winner
	Obama	Clinton	Obama	Clinton			
January Primaries/Caucuses							
Iowa (c)	72	16	33	27	50	2.1	O
Nevada (c)	83	14	34	52	77	6.8	C
South Carolina	78	19	36	24	47	29.5	O
Super Tuesday Primaries/Caucuses							
Alabama	84	15	25	72	106	26.0	O
Arizona	79	12	38	53	82	3.1	C

Arkansas	74	25	16	79	112	15.7	C
California	78	18	45	46	61	6.7	C
Connecticut	74	24	48	49	51	9.1	O
Delaware	86	9	40	56	83	19.2	O
Georgia	88	11	43	53	87	28.7	O
Illinois	93	5	57	41	62	15.1	O
Massachusetts	66	29	40	58	55	5.4	C
Missouri	84	15	39	57	87	11.2	O
New Jersey	82	14	31	66	113	13.6	C
New York	61	37	37	59	46	15.9	C
Tennessee	77	22	26	67	96	16.4	C
Mid-February Primaries/Caucuses							
Louisiana	86	13	30	58	101	32.5	O
Maryland	84	15	42	52	79	27.9	O
Virginia	90	10	52	47	65	19.6	O
Wisconsin	91	8	54	45	74	5.7	O
March Primaries/Caucuses							
Ohio	87	13	34	64	104	11.5	C
Texas	84	16	44	54	78	11.5	C
Mississippi	84	15	39	57	87	36.3	O
April-June Primaries/Caucuses							
Pennsylvania	90	10	37	63	106	10.0	C
Indiana	89	11	60	40	58	8.4	C
North Carolina	91	7	61	37	60	21.6	O
Kentucky	90	7	23	72	132	7.3	C

*refers to the voting within race minus the cross race voting (% of black support for Obama minus White support for Obama plus white support for Clinton minus black support for Clinton). 'c' refers to caucus and the rest are primaries.

Source: see <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21660890>; <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/2008-presidential-candidates/primaries/exit-polls/> in Rachlinski and Parks (2009: 33-34).

Careful examination of the table above shows us that Obama won all the black votes in all the states where the Democratic primaries were held and that too with a huge margin over Hillary Clinton. He won more than 60% of all black votes in all these states. This clearly shows the solid support of the black community for Obama even though initially many blacks were sceptical about his identity and were doubtful as to support him or not. Discussion of Obama being regarded as 'not black enough' for black support has been discussed in the previous chapter and therefore will not be discussed anymore. Looking at the support from the white community, we can see that Obama managed to win majority white support over Clinton in seven states - Iowa, South Carolina, Illinois, Virginia, Wisconsin, Indiana and North Carolina - and

that he went on to win six of these states out of the seven (only Indiana was won by Clinton) apart from the other eight states that he also won. He won seven states (South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi and North Carolina) which had more than 20% black voters while he won four states which have less than 20% but more than 10% black voters (Delaware, Illinois, Missouri, Virginia). The most amazing thing however is that, Obama won three states that have black voters below 10% (Iowa, Connecticut and Wisconsin). This, therefore, shows that Obama became successful in winning votes both from the white and black communities even though racial issues as were mentioned before kept on popping up throughout the primaries which could have otherwise harmed his candidacy hugely. Though other issues made voters go for Obama, in concern with racial issues alone, it can be seen that Obama's policy of deracializing himself and his policy seemed to have worked quite perfectly. He did not get the isolation from the black community that was thought to have happened since he had mixed-heritage and with Hillary Clinton being quite popular in the black community. Also, in the white community, he managed to garner enough votes even though many white voters became sceptical after certain issues concerning race came out during the primary season.

One important thing that is to be noted here is how Obama handled the issue of race. As can be seen from the discussion made before, Obama did not steer away from his policy of trying to bridge the racial gap between the blacks and the whites no matter how sensitive the case is, a good example can be the Wright issue and his answer to it through 'A More Perfect Union Speech.' A close study of how he dealt with racial issues during the Democratic primaries shows us that he carefully applied his race-neutral universal approach policy to quell the problems of race that confronted him during his campaigns before and during the primaries. His campaign team also played an effective and responsible role in helping him bring out such an important policy which was as effective to handle the racial issues that Obama could not escape. We can say that Obama embraced his race and propagated it in such a way that that would not isolate him from black voters but at the same time which would be clearly appreciated by white voters. Let us now move on to the general election.

The General Election and the Issue of Race:

The election of 2008 was historic with both the Republican and Democratic Party bringing in surprises. First, the Democratic Party's nomination process was exciting as a black man and a white woman were vying for the seat and the whole process was interesting with the issue of race taking centre-stage as mentioned before. While for the Republicans it was as usual an all white male competition but they threw in a surprise package once their presidential nominee was selected; they brought in a female politician to fight for the vice-presidential seat alongside John McCain, their presidential candidate. With incumbent vice president Dick Cheney having decided not to run for president, the 2008 general election was the first since 1952 that incumbent president who had completed one term nor the incumbent vice president had chosen to run for president and the first since 1928 that neither had sought his party's nomination (Clayton 2010: 123).

During the presidential campaign, issue of race took a back seat because the US was hit by recession and economic issues became the most important in the debates leading to Election Day. Not only was this issue, but also the wars that the US was fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan which made many citizens unsatisfied with the current administration of George W. Bush making him the lowest ranked president in popularity polls conducted while in office. Aside from the potential affiliation and economic conditions to reduce racial resentment's influence on presidential vote choice, both John McCain and Barack Obama were extremely reluctant to make race an issue (Tesler and Sears 2010: 54). Cooper and Powell (2008) mentioned in their article, "But Mr. McCain has condemned racist campaigning and has denounced Republican groups that tried to make an issue of inflammatory statements made by Mr. Obama's former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah A Wright Jr., and one of his own supporters who referred to Mr. Obama as 'Barack Hussein Obama' at a McCain rally" and also, Todd and Gawiser (2009) wrote that John McCain pledged early that he wouldn't do it and he kept his promise, to the chagrin of some Republican strategists (Todd and Gawiser 2009: 12). However we find that McCain did not discourage his campaign team, supporters and surrogates to engage in racist campaigning either. In effect to this, Rachlinski and Parks (2009) have also written that the 2008 campaign lacked messages as blunt as that of the Willy Horton advertisements, but the

campaign was not free from racial imagery. And the news media also focussed heavily on racial themes (Rachlinski and Parks 2009: 11).

The McCain camp was responsible for several negative advertisements which Obama finally countered in his remarks at a rally in Springfield, Missouri in late July, 2008. "So nobody really thinks that Bush or McCain have a real answer for the challenges we face, so what they're going to try to do is make you scared of me," Mr. Obama said in Springfield, Mo., echoing earlier remarks. "You know, he's not patriotic enough. He's got a funny name. You know, he doesn't look like all those other presidents on those dollar bills, you know. He's risky. That's essentially the argument they're making (Cooper and Powell 2008)." The point that Obama is trying to make here is that, all the negative advertisements that the McCain team had released was in a way, according to him, suggesting that Obama, by his looks and his name does not fit to become the next American president.

But the most important thing was the way the McCain team reacted to this comment. As we have learnt the way how race can become a disadvantage for a candidate as was for Hillary Clinton during the primaries, the McCain team was careful enough in making their comments. "Barack Obama has played the race card, and he played it from the bottom of the deck," Mr. McCain's campaign manager, Rick Davis, charged in a statement with which Mr. McCain later said he agreed. "It's divisive, negative, shameful and wrong (Cooper and Powell 2008)." Thus, the Republicans twisted Obama's comments and portrayed him as playing the race-card and accused him of trying to racialize the issue. Mr. McCain addressed Mr. Davis's "race card" comments when he said "I agree with it, and I'm disappointed that Senator Obama would say the things he's saying," Mr. McCain said aboard his campaign bus in Racine, Wisconsin, according to The Associated Press (Cooper and Powell 2008).

Instead of McCain's campaign injecting racial issues into the campaign trails, it was more of the Sarah Palin team who did this. As most of the time, McCain and Palin campaigned separately, we find that many racial abuses were heard like the case of a rally in Clearwater, Florida, where someone in the crowd used racial epithet in referring to an African-American cameraman for NBC, and someone else yelled "Kill him!" either referring to Obama or Ayers (Clayton 2010: 130). William Ayers is a

former Weather Underground bomber who knew Obama through Chicago politics and had served him on corporate boards (Clayton 2010: 130) and Palin had used this relation as a political tool to portray Obama as a man who sees America so imperfect that he chose to work with this 'domestic bomber' (Palin as quoted in Parker 2008). The effort seems intended to blend two messages – that of terrorism and that candidate Obama posed a danger to America (Rachlinski and Parks 2009: 13). Speaking of the second message, Rachlinski and Parks (2009) argues that branding a candidate's policies as dangerous is standard fare but attempting to make a candidate seem personally dangerous is a novel tactic that plays off of latent associations that most White Americans harbour between Black Americans and violence (Rachlinski and Parks 2009: 13).

This caused much harm for the McCain team when Congressman John Lewis of Atlanta issued a public statement warning McCain-Palin team to stop their racialized campaigns where he mentioned that there was no need for racial hostility in American political discourse (Perr 2008). McCain was very much taken by surprise because he had tried to steer himself away from racializing Obama because he too had become a victim of racial attacks in 2000 South Carolina primary where rumours were circulating that McCain's daughter, Bridget – whom he and his wife Cindy adopted from Bangladesh – was his own, illegitimate child (Martin and Smith 2008). Thus, his campaign team believed it was necessary for him to respond to Lewis and McCain opted to put out a statement calling on Obama to repudiate Lewis' comments (Clayton 2010). In response to this, the Obama team issued a statement:

"Senator Obama does not believe that John McCain or his policy criticism is in any way comparable to George Wallace or his segregationist policies. But John Lewis was right to condemn some of the hateful rhetoric that John McCain himself personally rebuked just last night, as well as the baseless and profoundly irresponsible charges from his own running mate that the Democratic nominee for President of the United States 'pals around with terrorists.' As Barack Obama has said himself, the last thing we need from either party is the kind of angry, divisive rhetoric that tears us apart at a time of crisis when we desperately need to come together (Quoted in Perr 2008)."

Apart from making small comments like the one mentioned above, Obama and his team stuck to the post-racial universal theme that was the crux of his policy. In every debate and campaign speech he made, Obama always made a mention of how the

people of America must unite and move beyond racial animosity. Obama weaves the professed ideals of America with the practised realities of America, constructing a concise vision of the problem of race relations in America (Stuckey et al. 2010: 423). And this message which he intertwined with the need for change and the hope for a better future seems to go well with voters. Especially voters from the black community seem to take the message better than any other community. Even among white voters, he did pretty well. Rachlinski and Parks (2009) have written that unlike previous black candidates, Obama enjoyed real success among white voters (Rachlinski and Parks 2009: 30).

A brief examination of voters' perception on race and how it affects their voting pattern can be made here. According to Todd and Gawiser (2009), most white voters, 92 percent said race was not important. Race, however, did have a negative impact on Obama's vote as white voters who acknowledged that race was important voted for McCain by a two to one margin. But, remarkably, one-third of white voters who said Obama's race was important voted for Obama (Todd and Gawiser 2009: 41). With the African-Americans, support for Obama was overwhelming. According to Todd and Gawiser (2009), the level of support for Obama among all black voters was so high that there is no significant difference between those who said race was important and those who said it wasn't (Todd and Gawiser 2009: 41). The 92 percent white voters declaring race as not an important factor in the determination of their votes, suggests that America has moved in a positive side in concern with the issue of race especially in electoral politics. However, McCain winning the white votes for whom race was an important factor clearly shows that race is still imminent in America and still an important determining factor in concern with white votes. On analysis from the campaign strategy side, Obama getting one-third vote of whites who thinks Obama's race was important seem to suggest that Obama's policy of deracializing was enough to woo them.

Election Day, 2008 – A Brief Summary:

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, was Election Day. After a 22-month campaign season (seventeen months were spent determining the nominee for the two major parties), the

election would come down to the turnout, or Get Out The Vote (GOTV) in campaign speak (Clayton 2010: 159). This day was an emotional event for many people especially those from the black community. It was a euphoric moment for the black people because, after all their struggles to get equal rights as citizens of America, they believed that they could make more changes if their man was elected. No wonder there was so much hype and excitement. Many came early and lined up even before the polling booths were opened. The media were reporting heavy turnout and long lines in the precincts around the country as the polls opened (Clayton 2010: 159). It was around 11:00 p.m. eastern standard time when polls were closed on the West Coast (polls were closed on the East Coast by 7 p.m. eastern standard time) and it was declared that Obama had won the election.

According to Clayton (2010), turnout for the election was expected to be high and the voter registration numbers were up and a record number of voters cast a vote due to tremendous efforts on the part of both campaigns to get out the vote. The final results showed 131.2 million Americans voted in the 2008 presidential election, compared to 122.3 million in 2004 – an increase of nine million votes (Clayton 2010: 161). According to the research conducted by Pew Hispanic Centre, overall, whites made up 76.3 percent of the record 131 million people who voted in November's presidential election, while blacks made up 12.1 percent, Hispanics 7.4 percent and Asians 2.5 percent (Lopez and Taylor 2009). Also, this research highlighted that black voter turnout rate increased 4.9 percentage points, from 60.3 percent in 2004 to 65.2 percent in 2008, nearly matching the voter turnout rate of white eligible voters (66.1 percent). For Hispanics, participation levels also increased, with the voter turnout rate rising 2.7 percentage points, from 47.2 percent in 2004 to 49.9 percent in 2008. Among Asians, voter participation rates increased from 44.6 percent in 2004 to 47.0 percent in 2008. Meanwhile, among white eligible voters, the voter turnout rate fell slightly, from 67.2 percent in 2004 to 66.1 percent in 2008 (Lopez and Taylor 2009).

More Democrats voted than Republicans, according to exit polls, by a 39 percent to 32 percent margin, which represented a change from 2004 when turnout for the two parties was 36 percent for the Democrats and 37 percent for the Republicans (Pomper 2010: 47). While the coalition of voters that supported Obama reflected the increasing diversity of America, and while Obama made gains across all demographic

subgroups, the majority of his support came from white voters (61% white, 23% blacks and 11% Hispanics while 90% of McCain's supporters were white as given in Todd and Gawiser 2009: 29). Obama did pretty well amongst white voters. Todd and Gawiser (2009) add that in 2008, 43 percent of white voters nationwide voted for Obama, while McCain won 55 percent of the white vote.

Coming back to black vote, Obama received an almost solid support from the community claiming 95 percent votes from the black community (Philpot et al. 2009), a little short of what Gallup Poll expected before the election - 99% black support was predicted by the poll (Saad 2008). As we see above, black voter turnout increased by a 4.9 percentage point. Much of the surge in black voter participation in 2008 was driven by increased participation among black women and younger voters (Lopez and Taylor 2009). According to the research done by Pew Hispanic Centre, the voter turnout rate among eligible black female voters increased by 5.1 percentage points, from 63.7 percent in 2004 to 68.8 percent in 2008 making black women to have, among all racial, ethnic and gender groups, the highest voter turnout rate in November's election—a first (Lopez and Taylor 2009). Also, young black eligible voters had the highest voter turnout rate from 49.5 percent in 2004 to 58.2 percent in 2008, in comparison to other racial and ethnic group of the same age (Lopez and Taylor 2009).

Minority groups such as Latinos and Asians also saw a rise in the number of their eligible voters. The poll conducted by Pew Research Centre shows that in 2008, Latino eligible voters accounted for 9.5 percent of all eligible voters, up from 8.2 percent in 2004 and the share of eligible voters who were Asian also increased, from 3.3 percent in 2004 to 3.4 percent in 2008. Among Latino voters, 67 percent voted for Obama while 31 percent voted for Republican John McCain. Among Asian voters, 62 percent supported Obama and 35 percent voted for McCain (Lopez and Taylor 2009). Thus, we find that in both the minority groups, support for Obama were very high.

Apart from this, Todd and Gawiser (2009) have accounted the success of Obama partly because of an unprecedented level of support among young people and new voters. Obama was supported by those voters under 30 by an impressive 66 percent margin, much higher than in any previous election, as well as 68 percent of new

voters (Todd and Gawiser 2009: 30). Women were another important support group of Obama. As mentioned above, 68.8 percent of black women alone voted in the general election of 2008 and of these, 96 percent voted for him. Of all the 47 percent women voting, Obama received 56 percent of their vote while 43 percent voted for McCain (Todd and Gawiser 2009: 32). However, concerning white women alone, McCain won them by 53 percent over Obama's 46 percent.

Let us now look at the election result, state by state. The table below gives us the number of votes that Obama and McCain received. Independent candidates' results have not been mentioned.

Table 2: Result for Obama and McCain in the 2008 Presidential Election:

States	Total Electoral Votes	Obama (O)		McCain (M)		Winner
		Popular Vote	Percentage	Popular Vote	Percentage	
Alabama	9	813,479	38.7%	1,266,546	60.3%	M
Alaska	3	123,594	37.9%	193,841	59.4%	M
Arizona	10	1,034,707	45.1%	1,230,111	53.6%	M
Arkansas	6	422,310	38.9%	638,017	58.7%	M
California	55	8,274,473	61.0%	5,011,781	37.0%	O
Colorado	9	1,288,568	53.7%	1,073,584	44.7%	O
Connecticut	7	1,000,994	60.7%	628,873	38.1%	O
Delaware	3	255,459	61.9%	152,374	36.9%	O
District of Columbia	3	245,800	92.5%	17,367	6.5 %	O
Florida	27	4,282,074	51.0%	4,045,624	48.4%	O
Georgia	15	1,844,137	47.0%	2,048,744	52.2%	M
Hawaii	4	325,871	71.8%	120,566	26.6%	O
Idaho	4	236,440	36.1%	403,012	61.5%	M
Illinois	21	3,419,673	61.9%	2,031,527	36.8%	O
Indiana	11	1,374,039	49.9%	1,345,648	48.9%	O
Iowa	7	828,940	53.7%	682,379	44.2%	O
Kansas	6	514,765	41.7%	699,655	56.6%	M
Kentucky	8	751,985	41.2%	1,048,462	57.4%	M
Louisiana	9	782,989	39.9%	1,148,275	58.6%	M
Maine	4	421,923	57.7%	295,273	40.4%	O
Maryland	10	1,629,467	61.2%	959,862	36.6%	O
Massachusetts	12	1,891,083	62.0%	1,104,284	36.2%	O
Michigan	17	2,872,579	57.4%	2,048,639	41.0%	O
Minnesota	10	1,573,354	54.1%	1,275,409	43.8%	O
Mississippi	6	554,662	43.0%	724,597	56.2%	M
Missouri	11	1,441,911	49.3%	1,445,814	49.4%	M

Montana	3	231,667	47.3%	242,763	49.5%	M
Nebraska	5	333,319	41.6%	452,979	56.5%	M
Nevada	5	533,736	55.1%	412,827	42.7%	O
New Hampshire	4	384,826	54.4%	316,534	44.7%	O
New Jersey	15	2,215,422	57.3%	1,613,207	41.7%	O
New Mexico	5	472,422	56.9%	346,832	41.8%	O
New York	31	4,769,700	62.1%	2,742,298	35.7%	O
North Carolina	15	2,142,651	49.7%	2,128,474	49.4%	O
North Dakota	3	141,278	44.6%	168,601	53.3%	M
Ohio	20	2,933,388	51.5%	2,674,491	46.9%	O
Oklahoma	7	502,496	34.4%	960,165	65.6%	M
Oregon	7	1,037,291	56.7%	738,475	40.4%	O
Pennsylvania	21	3,276,363	54.7%	2,651,812	44.4%	O
Rhode Island	4	296,571	63.1%	165,391	35.2%	O
South Carolina	8	862,449	44.9%	1,034,896	53.9%	M
South Dakota	3	170,924	44.7%	203,054	53.2%	M
Tennessee	11	1,085,720	41.8%	1,477,405	56.9%	M
Texas	34	3,528,633	43.7%	4,479,328	55.5%	M
Utah	5	327,670	34.4%	596,030	62.6%	M
Vermont	3	219,262	67.8%	98,974	30.6%	O
Virginia	13	1,959,532	52.6%	1,725,005	46.3%	O
Washington	11	1,750,848	57.7%	1,229,216	40.5%	O
West Virginia	5	304,127	42.6%	398,061	55.7%	M
Wisconsin	10	1,677,211	56.2%	1,262,393	42.3%	O
Wyoming	3	82,868	32.7%	164,958	65.2%	M

Source: Todd and Gawiser (2009).

Note: Only Obama's and McCain's results are highlighted in this table (O stands for Obama and M stands for McCain).

As seen from the above table, in the 2008 presidential election, of the fifty states voting in the US, Obama won twenty-nine states while McCain won twenty-two states. 69,297,997 popular votes was won by Obama while McCain won 59,597,520; also, of the 270 electoral votes necessary to secure the presidency (out of the total 538 electoral votes), Obama won 365 electoral votes while McCain won 173 electoral votes (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration 2008). One thing to be noted is that, Nebraska since 1992 has used the Congressional District Method in which electoral votes proportionally are distributed, with two at-large electors representing the state-wide winning presidential and vice presidential candidates and one elector each representing the winners from its three Congressional districts. For the first time since adopting this system, Nebraska's five electoral votes were split between the two major party tickets. The McCain-Palin ticket won Nebraska overall

and received the two at-large electors, as well as the electors from the First and Third Congressional Districts, where McCain-Palin also won. However, the Obama-Biden ticket won the Second Congressional District and, thus, received its one elector (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration 2008). A close study of the table above (Table 2) shows us that, in six states, notably – Florida, Indiana, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, and Ohio (names in alphabetical order), the race was pretty intense in which the winning percentage for either candidate was less than five percent. Also, nine other states – Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, New Hampshire, North and South Dakota, South Carolina and Virginia (names in alphabetical order) had a close election too with the winning percentage being more than five percent but less than ten percent.

Looking at the American presidential election of 2008, we can find that it was an interesting and important election especially in concern with race relation of the country. For the first time in the history of the country, a black man was elected to be the head of state. This event was closely followed not only by the citizens of America but by the whole world as history was in the making. A country with a past on slavery and civil rights issues, had reached a new milestone by bringing into office someone from the same community which was once denied of voting rights and equal citizenship in the country. Obama won the election with tremendous support from the black community and other minority communities notably the Hispanics and the Asians. He also managed to get significant support from the white community especially with the younger voters. He also had important political leaders like the late Edward Kennedy endorsing him from early in the election. So it can be said that Obama managed to forge an effective biracial coalition by studying both the primaries and the general election carefully. This seems to suggest that America has finally crossed its racial barrier and that racism was something of a decline.

A close study of the election however suggests that minority candidates are yet to win more support from the major voting bloc i.e. the white community. Majority of white votes still going to a white candidate is suggestive of the fact that racial issues are still problematic in America; that white voters are yet to let go of their prejudice towards minority communities especially the black community. Concerning the issue of race during the electoral campaigns both in the primary and the general election, we can

see that it was the more of the support group for either candidates (Hillary and Obama in the primary, Obama and McCain in the general election) who did more harm to the candidates than the candidates themselves inflicting harm to each other. Either it was their campaign team or their supporters or people they are related to or the media who was responsible for making a big issue concerning race. Whatever be these issues and who so ever was responsible, one thing clear and visible was that, racial issue still plays an important role in the elections of America and the presidential election of 2008 was no exception even though many times it was overshadowed by the economic issues and the war issues. Candidates still continue to use racial cues when so possible and voters still vote largely based on the race of a person. Even though with the case of the 2008 general election, candidates tried their best to stay away from playing the race card, it was somewhat inevitable for racial issues not to appear every once in a while because one of the two contenders was from a racial group i.e. the African-American community. We can, therefore, made the conclusion that race was an important part of the 2008 election and that race continues to play significant role in the politics of America.

Chapter 4

Black Politics of America and Barack Obama

I am rooted in the African-American community. But I'm not defined by it. I am comfortable in my racial identity. But that's not all I am.

– Barack Obama, November 14, 2009

Black politics of America have come a long way from the independence of America to the election of Obama as the President of America in 2008. For the community, the struggle for equality has always been an important part of both their social and political lives. From being mere slaves to occupying the White House, it is thus symbolically clear that the politics of the African-American community has finally evolved into something that can no longer be neglected in mainstream American politics. Thus, the election of Obama is of great importance in the study of black politics. But the questions remain, however, whether black politics is now fully integrated into mainstream American politics and with the evolution of the so-called post-racial politics is racial equality finally achieved in America? These questions will both be discussed and answered in the following chapter.

In this chapter therefore, a study of black politics has been made to cross examine how black politics have evolved and developed over time in order to bring out the impacts it has on the politics and racial relations of America. When discussing the growth of black politics, important black leaders and the influence of their political ideologies and perceptions on black politics have been highlighted. An analysis of Obama's policy in relation with black politics has been made in order to highlight whether Obama's politics is totally different from black - traditional black in particular – politics or whether there is some similarity. Another important thing that has been highlighted in this chapter is how Obama tries to connect himself with black politics.

McLemore (1975) had written that, the very foundation of a theory of black politics rests on the clear understanding that Afro-Americans are a racial group and not an ethnic group. In defining race, she further said, “When we speak of a racial group, we are referring to those minorities in a society which are set off from the majority not only by cultural differences, but in a more profound sense by skin colour (high visibility) and near total inability of that group to assimilate into the larger society (McLemore 1975: 323).” This is particularly true with the case of the African-American community especially with the inability of the community to integrate successfully into the larger society and mainstream politics of America. The reason for this is that the community is yet to achieve racial equality in the nation. This chapter begins with the evolution of black political interest and its gradual growth till the election of Obama as the President of America. Here, as shall be observed, various efforts and interests that blacks have had in concern with the politics of America and how they incorporate their interest for the growth and development of the community have been highlighted.

Black Political Interest Before and During the American Revolution:

It was, in some way, from the American Revolution of 1776 that the African-American community had taken interest in the politics of America, though at that time they were still slaves and had no freedom to exercise their political ambitions. One important thing that must be noted is that, even before the American Revolution started, blacks had always resisted slavery. Jalata (2002) has written that the ancestors of African-American, both individually and in groups, resisted enslavement in Africa and fought slavery on slave ships and later on the American plantations; they fought culturally, and some of them ran away whereas others engaged in mutinies and armed resistance. According to Colston (1979), “There were about 250 slave rebellions in the United States between the 17th and 19th centuries” and Apthekar (1947, 1979) has also written that about 50 maroon communities were formed by thousands of runaway slaves and their descendants between 1672 and 1864 in the forests and mountains of southern states (both cited in Jalata 2002: 89). Before the Revolution started in America, the planters and merchants had great influence in the political undertakings

of the colonies and therefore they had an upper hand in the law and order of the lands. Poor whites and the black slaves had no influence in the public decision making process both in the slave-owning Southern colonies and the Northern colonies which propagated freedom of religion.

Since blacks and the poor whites did not have any political influence, when the flame of fighting independence from the British crown started doing the rounds, these poor and oppressed people became quite interested in it. For the blacks, this seemed like a good opportunity to gain freedom from slavery and gain equality in the new land that they have been brought to. They greatly supported the idea of democracy propagated by the colonialists and took it in their own terms to build the foundation for their struggle for freedom from slavery. Describing this ambition of blacks, Marable (1998) has even argued that black Americans had an impact upon national political culture and independent ideology that was stronger than any other American (Marable 1998: 4). Many even enlisted in the war against Britain on the promise of being granted freedom from slavery after the war. According to Marable (1998), it was the American Revolution that spawned a political and moral movement to eliminate slave trade to the colonies. He further states that by 1780, consistent with the democratic ideology of the Revolution, several states began to move toward the general emancipation of all slaves but that most political leaders, drawn largely from the planter and merchant classes, were unwilling to extend democratic rights to blacks and preferred to maintain a hierarchy based on race, class and economics (Marable 1998: 3). It was from this period on that racial inequality was maintained more strongly than before and this was further cemented with the drafting of the Constitution of America.

After formal independence from Great Britain was achieved, African-Americans continued to agitate for their democratic rights (Marable 1998: 5). As their agitations grew, whites especially from the Southern plantation states became alarmed. But at the same time many whites also pushed for the freedom of blacks from slavery especially in the northern colonial states. Slavery at this time was legal in all the states except Massachusetts. Marable (1998) had written that Madison and Jefferson astutely recognised that emancipation would require the inevitable granting of suffrage to blacks and, later, the full desegregation of civil and social relations between the races.

He mentioned that this was the point at which democratic principles collapsed and white supremacy came to the forefront (Marable 1998: 7). Slavery was a contentious issue at the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia in 1787, with the Northern and the Southern delegates in disagreement over whether slaves should be counted for purposes of taxation and representation (Clayton 2010: 6). But in the end we find that the proposal for keeping slaves triumphed because these representatives favoured compromising their differences through the 'three-fifth compromise' in which representation and taxation were to be based on the "number of free persons," plus three-fifths of the number of "all other persons" (Edwards III et al. 1998: 35); apart from this was the "fugitive slave clause" of 1793 in which runaway slaves would be returned back to their owners. Eventually, even free blacks were denied of their right to vote. A reading of history clearly points out that Black people as a legal and theoretical component of the American system of government have been left out of its political life-not mistakenly, but on purpose (McLemore 1975: 324). The institution of slavery had been built on deep and imbedded racism toward African Americans and on the concomitant presumption of white supremacy (Pitcaithley 2002: 5).

Slowly, by the later part of the 18th century, northern states began to abolish slavery while in a way we can say that it became more entrenched in the southern states. In 1808, we find that the Congress abolished international slave trade in America. Then in 1820, the Missouri Compromise in which states would be admitted in pairs where one would be a free state and the other a slave owning state was passed in the Congress. Forty years after this Compromise, the American Civil War broke out. It was the election of Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, in 1860, who campaigned that he would not allow the expansion of slavery apart from the already existing states that led to this historic moment and a very important chapter in the politics of African-Americans. The war started in 1861 and lasted till 1865 and was eventually won by Lincoln and the Union. Anticipated for 40 years, from the time the United States Congress first limited the extension of slavery into the western territories, the war sealed the fate of the institution of slavery and ended forever the question of secession (Pitcaithley 2002: 5).

The Reconstruction Era and the Evolution of Black Politics:

The abolition of slavery however did not end the sufferings of blacks. Though granted freedom and citizenship of America plus the right to vote through the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments of the Constitution, they were treated as second-class citizens. These three amendments, collectively known as the Civil War Amendments, gave hope to African-Americans during this period known as Reconstruction, that America would finally make good on its promise of equality for all of its citizens (Clayton 2010: 7). But things became worse for the black community as they began their new journey of freedom but without equal rights. Pitcaithley (2002) had written , “Over the next several decades, the rights of black Americans slowly eroded throughout the American South with the enactment of Jim Crow laws which segregated blacks socially and marginalized them politically and economically (Pitcaithley 2002: 6). The freedom that they attained was still very limited and socially and politically, they were allowed to exercise their freedom only to a limited extent. Blacks and whites who were sympathetic to their cause made joint efforts pushing for the extension of the democratic principles to the black people. There were constant struggles to get basic education and resources for development; and legal protection was also sought for especially in southern states and the Congress by black leaders for the protection of the freedom that they had won. However, many of these leaders favoured seeking opportunities rather than distribution and never really sought to achieve economic revolution.

Despite the efforts of black reformers, the Compromise of 1877 and the withdrawal of federal troops from the South effectively ended the gains of Reconstruction (Marable and Mullings 2009: 118). This compromise was made after the presidential election of 1876. In that election, the Republican candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes, struck a deal with Samuel Tilden, the Democrat candidate, in which the Republicans pledged to withdraw federal troops from the South if Hayes were allowed to become president (Clayton 2010: 7). This greatly diminished whatever political power that blacks had gained and white supremacy was once again uplifted. Lynching of blacks became common in the south and blacks were not permitted in many public places or would be segregated even if they were allowed entry. Separate seating in public transportations, public places, educational institutions, eateries etc. was the norm of

the day. Reconstruction was a time of significant political gains, but that was soon shut down by whites, mostly southern, who systematically disenfranchised African-American through the use of poll taxes, literacy tests and the grandfather clause (Reed 2010: 373). Many educated and influential black leaders started to bring out various policies to help blacks to either adapt to these or agitate against it. Thus, we can say that it was during these periods that a more organised black politics began to evolve. Marable and Mullings (2009) have written that blacks had no intention of being confined to a social and political status of permanent servitude even though slavery had been destroyed and their leaders were pressuring the government to go well beyond the Emancipation proclamation, to full voting rights and political representation of black men.

Since racial integration was an impossible dream at this time, black leaders began to come up with new political and social agendas. Black Nationalism in the form of racial uplift, self-help and black cultural pride began to gain prominence. Noted leaders like Booker T. Washington accepted white supremacy but through this acceptance, sought to uplift black economic development. He became quite famous and his Tuskegee Institute for the training of blacks in industrial and agricultural techniques became an important institution for the black community to build their skill. At the same time, he was severely criticized by many black intellectuals, journalists and political leaders. Of the most famous amongst these was W.E.B. Du Bois and together with other critics of Washington, they formed the Niagara Movement in 1905, comprising of intellectuals, clergymen, journalists and lawyer. This movement vigorously opposed the policy of accommodation and Jim Crow segregation. And it was this very movement which became the inspiration and background of the very important liberal racial black movement, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). Both Washington and Du Bois were engaged deeply with the white political establishment during their time. Washington appealed to the Republican Party, philanthropists, and industrialists, while Du Bois sought the support of white reformers, liberals and intelligentsia (Marable and Mullings 2009: 120). During this time, black women were also very active as they were during the anti-slavery movements and in 1896 the National

Association of Coloured Women was established. They fought vigorously against the convict leasing system and the Jim Crow Laws.

The Era of the Civil Rights Movements:

In May 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States made a historic decision in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case which changed forever the racial relation of America when it unanimously overturned the 'separate but equal' policy that had been followed in schools across America. This event somehow gave the black community more confidence and power in their appeal for equality in the country. The following year, 1955, marked one of the most important historic event of America especially in relation with racial relation of America when Rosa Parks, a black woman refused to give up her seat for a white passenger in Montgomery which led to her arrest. On December 4th, black churches in the area made the announcement that the black community was going to boycott buses. This was the beginning of the more organised struggle for complete destruction of the institution of segregation that had become rooted in the American society. The era was marked by mass campaigns and demonstrations by the black community which eventually led to desegregation with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequently the Voting Rights Acts in 1965. Black politics underwent various evolutionary phase throughout this era with many political ideologies coming into prominence. As seen before, during the reconstruction era too, black politics witnessed the culmination of several of political ideologies under different leaders. However, the intensity and wave of grassroots political action was most prominent during these turbulent years of American history (Hill 2009a: 24). It was during the era of the civil rights movements that black politics became a broad-based united front fighting for equal rights as rightful citizens of America.

Black politics at this time was composed of three main ideological groups namely, the moderate or conservative wing which had the NAACP headed by Roy Wilkins and the National Urban League headed by Whitney M. Young; the centrist group which had the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) headed by Martin Luther King Jr. who became the voice of black freedom movement during the era and the

Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) headed by James Farmer; and the left wing which was composed of mainly the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) influenced by black radical leaders like Henry Highland Garnet, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, William Monroe Trotter and Paul Robeson. The right wing group which can be labelled as the moderate or liberal integrationists wanted to become fully assimilated into the American society, politics and economic enterprise and hoped that mainstream America would eventually embrace the racial reforms that they sought without any political backlash for the black community. The centrists on the other hand wanted to secure voting rights for every citizen and complete desegregation. They wanted to achieve success for these causes through nonviolent protesting methods. But the left wing was more radical on their approach and wanted the destruction of Jim Crow. This group sees integration as a means and not the end of black freedom (Marable and Mullings 2009: 346). The most extreme and influential of the radicals emerged during the 1960s initially under the Nation of Islam headed by Elijah Muhammad and later separated from this group, Malcolm X as he was popularly known and who left a powerful legacy in black politics.

Since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 did not bring the desired economic and political equality, black politics once again experienced a new form of politics famously known as 'Black Power.' Though earlier this ideology had been floated in black politics, it gained more prominence during these years because of the support given to it by the new leader of SNCC, Stokely Carmichael who later came to be known as Kwame Ture. For nearly a decade, Black Power replaced liberal integrationism as the dominant political ideology and discourse for many African-Americans (Marable and Mullings 2009: 348). Marable and Mullings (2009) have identified five major tendencies which they believed characterised the contradictory movement of Black Power, which they also believed are overlapping each other.

First was the conservative black nationalism which drew inspiration from the ideas of Booker T. Washington and insisted that blacks should establish their own businesses, employ other blacks, and sell their goods and services to black consumers. To them, racial integration should be only within the capital market and that the upliftment of the community was in their own hands. Second was cultural nationalism which

focussed on the African identity of blacks and transformation of their culture, practices, names, family structure, their sense of dressings etc. to the practices of Africans in mainland Africa. The next was the black religious nationalists who sought to merge black spirituality and faith with black politics. This is somewhat a common theme of black politics. In Christianity, Christ was portrayed as black and the religion itself was projected as a revolutionary institution on the side of the oppressed. In connection to this, let us discuss here briefly about the influence of religion in black politics.

The political culture of black America since slavery was heavily influenced by the Bible, particularly the Old Testament saga of Moses and Joshua as “deliverers” of an oppressed, enslaved people who found themselves in a foreign land (Marable 1998: xiii). Therefore, the foundation of black politics is somewhat rested deeply in religion most importantly, the Christian faith. According to Marable and Mullings (2009), the church became a major site of political organising throughout the history of African-Americans and that charismatic leadership was a hallmark of black politics. This therefore greatly influenced later generations and many important religious leaders who have great influence in black politics from the civil rights struggles to current black politics have come up, notably – Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Louis Farrakhan and many others. Till today, it is a common thing in black churches where their pastors preach to their congregation about the racial politics of America and try to influence blacks to fight against racial prejudice that exists till today in America.

During slavery, the church was the only legal institution through which enslaved people could exchange information as well as worship (Marable and Mullings 2009: 6). Since church and family were the only things that blacks were allowed to develop, according to Corbett and Corbett (1999), the black church became the central institution in black communities which in due time became the focus for dealing with social, economic and political problems in black community (Corbett and Corbett 1999: 302). Richard Allen’s “African Methodist Episcopal Church” which he founded in 1816, has become the foundations of black church and remains the largest and most influential force inside the black community (Marable and Mullings 2009: 6). After the civil wars, the black church became a powerful political institution through which

many factions tried to persuade voters. It was during these periods that most of the black elected officials were members of the clergy. It was not an uncommon thing in the black community to have clergymen active in local and state politics. From the end of Reconstruction to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Black Church became the primary arena for black political activity (Corbett and Corbett 1999: 303).

When various political organisations came to be born in the black community in the periods culminating the civil rights movements, the black church and the black clergy was the primary support group for them even though these organisations were not religious in nature. As we know, this period was marked by various protests and demonstrations to end segregation and inequality. According to Corbett and Corbett (1999), hundreds of black clergy and their congregations supported the efforts for civil rights where the black churches provided meeting places, information centres and the activists for civil rights demonstrators (Corbett and Corbett 1999: 306). Islam also became an influential religion in the black community during the freedom movements. As mentioned before, the Nation of Islam had a deep impact in the politics of the African-American community during Elijah Muhammad's time and also during the time Malcolm X was a member. This religious group also experienced a new organisational rebound as Marable and Mullings (2009) put it, due to the emergence of charismatic new national spokesman, Louis Farrakhan (Marable and Mullings 2009: 350).

However, it was the Black Power movement that was the most theoretically and politically rich group that emerged in the 1960s according to Marable and Mullings (2009) and within this group, the most prominent and widely studied was the Black Panther Party whose armed confrontations with the police and the free educational and health care programs they sponsored for poor urban communities conferred upon them an almost legendary status (Marable and Mullings 2009: 350). Then came the black activists within the Communist Party which were somewhat politically similar but independent of the Panthers which made significant gains in the black community by the late 1960s. Finally, the Black Power group with the greatest influence, at least by the mid-1970s, were the black elected officials (Marable and Mullings 2009: 351). The first batch of black elected officials followed race-specific policies and carried on

with them the legacy of the political style of the civil rights movements. This was no surprise as many of these officials contested mostly in majority black jurisdiction. Let us now look at the phase of black politics after the major legislative success of the civil rights movement.

Beyond the Civil Rights and the Evolution of New Black Politics:

Black elected officials began to grow in large numbers after the Voting Rights Act was passed and even led to the establishment of the Congressional Black Caucus in 1971. Initially, majority of these officials got elected from majority black jurisdiction and propagated policies that were race-specific. They employed the rhetoric of cultural, religious and even revolutionary nationalism to win elections (Marable and Mullings 2009: 351). However, as more and more black activists became interested in electoral politics, they started aspiring to be fully assimilated into mainstream American politics. Thus, it became clear to these black politicians that not all of them can contest or win only from majority black jurisdiction. They knew that they had to win white votes if they want to succeed further in their political venture. Therefore, it was these new set of politicians who led to the evolution of a new kind of black politics which has become quite prominent in the black political sphere from the late 1980s.

But one must never forget that the first batch of blacks elected to political offices were very race-centred in their approach. As mentioned before, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 greatly increased the voter registration of blacks thereby increasing participation of blacks in American politics especially at the local and state level and the most notable advances were seen in the southern states. In the early history-making elections that occurred after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, blacks turned out in record numbers and voted overwhelmingly for black candidates (Cohen 2010: 203). Black candidates who won offices during these times did not feel the need to transcend their race but rather, their policies were largely based on racialized agendas like fighting for services and resources while at the same time fighting for the dignity and rightful places for blacks in their constituencies. Thus, far from avoiding or downplaying the significance of race to the country – a political strategy that was not

available to black elected officials at that historic moment – their constituents expected them to make race central to their representational styles and agendas (Cohen 2010: 204). If they propagated this agenda as expected by their black constituents, they were hailed as highly loyal to the black struggle and the black community. This question of ‘loyalty’ is very important in the black community. Black voters want candidates who are most sympathetic to their cause and their struggle and this was why, in the early campaign days of Obama, he was often questioned whether he was ‘black enough’ because of his mixed-ancestry as well as his approach on racial issues.

Famous amongst these first batch of African-American politicians were Carl B. Stokes (Mayor, Ohio 1968), Hatcher (Mayor, Gary, Indiana 1968), representatives such as John Conyers Jr. (Michigan 1965), Louis Stokes (Ohio 1969), William Lacy Clay (Missouri 1969), Shirley Chisholm (New York 1969) etc. Since these officials and their constituents were victims of Jim Crow and involved in the struggles of the civil rights movements, and educated in black educational institutions, for them strengthening and promoting the black cause and agenda was very important. Cohen (2010) has argued that since these politicians have lived through the daily reminders of systemic racism in this country, understood that statewide offices and predominately white districts were probably not available to them, so the focus of their agendas, their aspirations, and the roots of their power were clearly tied to their black constituencies (Cohen 2010: 204). This style of politics is what is called as the traditional black politics.

However, the increasing election of these black officials also resulted in the moving of whites to other constituencies or the suburbs which greatly reduced the tax base in these communities and also with the decreasing federal welfare programmes under the Reagan administration, it became increasingly difficult for black officials at the local and state level politics to develop their constituencies. This led to increased poverty for the poor blacks and also the middle class experienced their living conditions slipping down. It was the disenchantment of these people that led to the evolution of a new phase of black politics. As mentioned before, these new set of politicians no longer made race central to their agendas but rather followed policies that were more about uplifting the whole constituencies and improve conditions for all poor people

rather than keeping their focus on just the black community. This attracted them many votes from other minority communities as well as the white community.

These new politicians often won their election in contestation with other black candidates who were closely identified with the civil rights generation and who made black issues central to their agenda. But there were also many others who won against white candidates and also in majority white districts as well. These individuals demonstrated that black officials could broaden their constituencies to include significant numbers of white voters, modelling new ways of building a base for the next generation of black officials like Barack Obama (Cohen 2010: 206). At the local level, the most notable was Harold Washington who forged the first successful coalition of blacks, Latinos, labour, progressive whites and other constituencies to become the first mayor of Chicago in 1983. The advances achieved by politicians like Washington pressured local and national politics to give greater priority to African-American issues, and set the stage for the 1984 presidential campaign of Jesse Jackson (Marable and Mullings 2009: 494). Jesse Jackson was the first serious contender from the black community to fight for Democratic Party nomination in 1984 and 1988 American presidential elections respectively.

In the local and state level politics of America, black politics began to experience a new form of policy which was first espoused by Edward Brooke, a black Massachusetts Republican who became member of the US Senate in 1966 in 97 percent white state (Sugrue 2010: 27), but which gained prominence during the late 1980s and early 1990s with the election of several black politicians from majority white jurisdictions. Brooke, as written by Sugrue (2010), distanced himself from Massachusetts' racially polarized politics. Then came Harold Washington, Tom Bradley, Harvey Gantt and later during the 1990s, L. Douglas Wilder, Carol Moseley-Braun, David Dinkins, Norman Rice and others. These new black politicians have been able to cross over the racial barrier and garner enough white votes to win without diminishing their black support either. They still managed to get majority black support and good support from other minority communities as well. For them to achieve this support, they had to follow a campaign strategy that would have to bridge racial barriers and present themselves as non-threatening especially to the white voters. As a result, majority of these politicians started to distance themselves from

social-protest movements and the black nationalist groups. Albritton et al. (1996) have made an argument that one of the most significant shifts in the “New Black Politics” is the movement away from traditional sources of political recruitment – churches and the civil rights movement and that political aspirants espousing this policy seek political office as nothing more than a career path. The political strategy of this cohort of black politicians have been discussed and analysed in Chapter 2 of this research; thus, only relevant issues in concern with this chapter will be discussed here again.

This new form of black politics is more pragmatic in its approach. With transcending of race and downplaying one’s race becoming central themes of strategy for this policy, many black politicians following this policy are often criticized by black leaders who still espoused the protest and agitation style of policy for demanding the needs of the community. Cohen (2010) has written that this new generation of black officials and elites have their sights set not on conquering the domain reserved for them – the domain of leading black people – but are interested in having power over and in every aspect of American politics (Cohen 2010: 202). She is suggesting that these new black politicians are no longer interested in achieving black goals and demands but are rather interested in curving a name for themselves. This may be true in many aspects because these politicians seem to drift further away from black agendas and black politics. But on the other hand, this can also be argued against because even though race-based or black issues are downplayed, still the policy of trying to be responsible for the whole constituency or district includes the black community as they are still a part of that constituency or district. Also, since this is a part of a campaign strategy used by candidates to garner votes from all communities to get elected, it does not suggest that they will be racially transcending or race neutral in their work once elected to office. A good example can be Douglas L. Wilder who was criticized for having run a deracialized campaign but who at the same time was willing to play the race card when it suited his political end (Shexnider 1996: 26).

In spite of the political gains by the African-Americans at the local and state levels in the South after 1965, black political success at the national level throughout the country was abysmal at best (Clayton 2010: 12). In 1966, six blacks were serving in the American Congress and by 1969, they became nine. Amongst them, Shirley

Chisholm was the first to run for president of the United States in 1972. According to Clayton (2010), it was never the goal of Chisholm to win but to make a strong showing and to prove that a woman and a black could run for president. Then the next to run was Jesse Jackson who launched Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) after King's assassination to advance black interests. Though he was opposed by black leaders like Coretta Scott King and Andrew Young, Jackson could however build a successful coalition of blacks, Latinos, lesbians and gays, environmentalists, peace activists, progressives from organized labour, and many others (Marable and Mullings 2009: 494). Even though he lost the nomination seat, Jackson demonstrated that African-Americans are even capable of winning national level elections. In 1988, he again ran for nomination from the Democratic Party, building another interracial coalition called the Rainbow Coalition which also prompted many blacks to register for voting. Jackson this time lost narrowly to his fellow Democrat Michael Dukakis but he made a stronger contention than his previous effort and showed that black politics has grown and developed greatly throughout the years. After him, in 2004, Carol Moseley Braun and Rev. Al Sharpton both ran for nomination seat from the Democratic Party. Braun was the first and only female African-American to be elected to the US Senate and served from 1993 till 1999 while Rev. Al Sharpton is a Baptist minister and a prominent black leader.

While politically blacks had made significant gains, socially and economically, majority were still struggling. Due to the shifting of many American industries abroad, many blacks became unemployed. This resulted in the growth of social evils such as robbery and drug abuse in the black community. Especially during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, the federal government greatly reduced or eliminated altogether many of the welfare support programmes of which majority of the poor blacks were dependent upon. Therefore, this increased the poverty level in the black community and greatly decreased moral value in the community making them once again victims to white prejudice of labelling blacks as law breakers which is prevalent till today. With the increase of crime rate, many states began to build new prisons to hold an increasing number of black convicts. What one must remember here is that, this is the case of poor blacks and less educated or uneducated blacks. The better educated blacks with specific skills, mostly the richer black class began to grow and

develop at the same time. However, the black middle class which was not far ahead than the lower black class saw many of their opportunities slipping away because of degrading social and economic condition. Thus, they became disheartened with the traditional form of black politics. This resulted in the rise of well-educated black politicians as mentioned before.

Marable and Mullings (2009) had written that by mid-1990s, in response to the escalating prison industrial complex and epidemic of police brutality, many African-Americans concluded that new kind of social protest was necessary, to promote black pride, personal responsibility, and collective empowerment (Marable and Mullings 2009: 496). This resulted in the famous, "Million Man March" in 1995 called by Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam. One million participants approximately marched to Washington Mall to mark this historic event. The march was, for many, an emotional event that symbolized the coming together of black men across generations, rededicated to a common social and political project of atonement, personal responsibility, and collective empowerment (Marabel and Mullings 2009: 496). This helped raised the awareness about the continued struggle by the community against inequality and resulted in as much as 1.5 million more blacks registering to vote.

A close examination of black participation in electoral politics after the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act were passed seem to suggest that there can be three broad patterns in black political campaign style. The first, as we know it, was prominent right after these two acts were passed and is commonly known as the traditional black politics. Black politicians back then had little or no choice but to stick to race-specific agendas to become successful in their political venture because they had no other vote bank than from the community itself. They contested from majority black jurisdictions and continued the legacy of the civil rights movements. They fought vigorously for black rights and for the development the black community. But as mentioned before, because of federal programmes it soon became difficult for them to make much difference which soon disheartened their constituencies. This then led to rise of new black politics in which political aspirants began to move a little away from race-oriented campaign styles. These politicians executed campaign styles that form the second and the third types of black political

style. They have been categorized into two different types in this present study because, the second black politics which succeeded the first batch of black politics was still very much attached to black cause even though they forged inter-racial coalition to win elections. Jesse Jackson as we saw formed the inter-racial 'Rainbow Coalition' when he fought for the Democratic nomination seat for president of America in 1988. Though he was successful in winning support from other minority communities and little white vote, he could not garner enough white votes because he was seen as a man who was too closely attached to the black cause. This could be the result of his active participation during the Civil Rights protest movements and later as a prominent leader succeeding Martin Luther King Jr. in furthering the black cause. Another good example will be Carol Moseley-Braun. While she ran a political campaign emphasizing economics issues, coalition building, and garnering support from mainstream party officials, she received overwhelming black support, she described herself as a product of the civil rights movement (Oden 1996: 60).

The third political campaign style however has been hailed as the new black politics because these new black politicians have executed new style of campaigning which no longer includes specific black cause in their agendas. They in fact do not mention or propagate policies that favour any particular community, not even the one they belong to. Instead, they have transcended race and minimized the issue of race as much as they can. For this, they have applied the tactic of appealing voters by presenting their cause as broad based and inclusive as they can. When they talk of poverty or developmental issues, they present it in such a way that the issue includes all the poors in their constituencies and not just poor blacks even though majority of them would belong to the black community and the same case happens when they talk of developmental issues; they would talk of developing the whole constituency and the least developed part of their constituency without making an emphasis that these are the areas where majority of blacks would be residing. According to Marable and Clarke (ed.) (2009), these politicians frequently distance themselves from traditional liberal constituencies and corporate investment in poor urban neighbourhoods, favoured funding charter schools as an alternative to public school systems (Marable and Clarke ed. 2009: 4).

In Chapter 2 of this research this policy has been highlighted as deracialization and this concept is becoming an important part of black politics. As the issue has been discussed in that chapter in detail, repetition will not be made in this chapter. Albritton et al. (1996) have argued that one of the most significant shifts in the 'New Black Politics' is the movement away from the traditional sources of recruitment – churches and the civil rights movement. This reflects most of the new black politicians who are no longer as much attached to solely the black community for their electoral success. Rather these politicians look beyond the black vote with the hope of breaking ranks with the white community. This in a way can help the growth of black politics because these elected black officials who follow deracialized policies demonstrate that even blacks are good enough to hold high offices thereby in a way proving the credibility of blacks as good citizens. Obama can be categorized as belonging to the third kind of black politicians. His campaign style especially his approach towards race seems to have the characteristic of this new kind of black politics. As mentioned and discussed in Chapter 2 of this research, Obama only talks about his race only when prompted and even if he does so, would always present it in such a way that he makes no partiality about it. Let us now look at how much his policy represents and differs from the black politics as discussed above.

Obama and Black Politics: How Similar? How Different?

Taking a look at Obama's political style, he seems to differ a lot from the traditional, civil rights era politicians of the black community. He, as mentioned in the previous two chapters and in this, is more in line with the new black politics where race is no longer used as a central agenda to get elected. Apart from this, he has come to prominence without dependence on the usual black institutions or sponsors (Bobo and Charles 2009: 256). As discussed in the previous chapters, scholars like Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008), Smith and King (2008), Marable (2009), Ford (2009), Harris (2009) to name a few have all argued that Obama's campaign policies and his approach on race is a reflection of the new young black politicians who started to get elected in large numbers, some of them in majority white districts, by propagating race-neutral agendas. Even Ifill (2009) has written that Obama and his advisers

decided early that he was not going to win the presidency by playing up his race and Clayton (2010) has also written that the cornerstone for Obama to win the White House was to run a deracialized campaign and continued that Obama represents a new style of African-American politician: post-civil rights era and not polarising to white voters as some members of the civil rights era such as Rev. Jesse Jackson or Rev. Al Sharpton.

By making a close study of the campaign strategy that Obama used as have been done in detail in the previous chapters also suggests the same proposition as these scholars that Obama did indeed and intentionally follow deracialized policy to succeed in his political venture. Cohen (2010) have also clubbed Obama amongst these new kinds of black politicians whom she mentions as those who have galvanized crossracial segments of the population such as young people, building coalitional infrastructures like none witnessed before, especially in the electoral arena of black candidates. This can be clearly seen in the voters support for Obama as given in detail in the previous chapter. We find that Obama was hugely successful amongst youths from all racial communities and also women voters. These groups as we see were major contributors for his win in the 2008 US presidential election.

However, this chapter will also highlight not only the similarities of Obama and the new black politics but also traditional politics. But before that, it is important to make a brief comment on why Obama needs to make a connection with black politics. As have been written in the previous chapters about his background, Obama is often considered as not closely related to the black cause. Walters (2007) has mentioned that Obama appeared to be of African descent, but the cultural makers to which American Blacks were exposed presented him as someone born of a White American mother and a Kenyan father and raised in Hawaii. This clearly shows that one main reason that blacks did not trust him initially was because Obama does not share the same historical make-up as these people. In the words of Walter (2007), "In short, his identity omitted many of the cultural markers with which blacks are more familiar to the extent that it has promoted a curiosity of 'cultural fit' that in turn has become an issue of political trust (Walters 2007: 13)." As this was the case, in order to get support from the black community, Obama needed to show the black community that he was one of them even though he may have a different background from them.

Walters (2007) has made an argument that if candidates had previously established confidence among black voters, based on their historical and cultural experience in the black community, black voters would most likely reciprocate by allowing the candidates to run on liberal universal themes, because there would be an unspoken understanding that such candidates could not be expected to run "Black campaigns" (Walters 2007: 14). This seems to be the case for most of the new black politicians who runs for office at the local and state levels. Mostly these politicians have their fathers and grandfathers participating in civil rights movements and even though they propagate race-neutral policies, they still vehemently get full support from the black community. However, as for Obama the case becomes complicated as he did not have any ancestry to trace back to either the period of slavery or the civil rights movements. So, support of the black community for him greatly depended on how he made connections with the black community, to show them that he was a part of them.

Though Obama, as can be seen from the analysis made before, clearly represents the new black politics and seem to differ a lot from traditional black politics hugely inspired by the civil rights movements of the 1960s, a close study however shows us that Obama has not completely neglected traditional black politics and has used it as an effective tool to make connection with the black community. He differs from the traditional black politics in that he refuses to use race as his tool to appeal voters and did not try to propagate black demands through his campaigns. Yet when he talks of race, especially when addressing black voters, he makes sure that he includes important parts of the civil rights legacies so that black voters will not feel isolated by him. King (2011) has argued that the process by which Obama became black was more important for the African-American community than it was for the whites. He worked out his identity by his choice of friends, sports (basketball not bowling), music and reading, especially the canonical African American writers running from Frederick Douglass to W. E. B. Du Bois, Richard Wright to James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison and on to Malcolm X, not to mention the often rich historiography of the civil rights movement (King 2011: 65). He knew well enough that the civil rights struggles meant a lot to the black community and hence made sure that he does not neglect this. While urging blacks to move on from the pains that slavery and segregation have

inflicted on them, Obama skilfully paid tribute to the civil rights leaders for their efforts in guiding and developing the black community to convince blacks that he too is deeply influenced by them.

Another important thing is that, Obama like many black leaders often draws on religion to make his appeal. Religion as mentioned before plays a huge role in black politics and most of the politicians who follow traditional black politics make use of this tactic. In his book, *Dreams from My Father*, Obama made a description of his first service at Trinity Church in which he made biblical references to his experience which Frank (2009) has written as keystone of an Africentric expression of Christianity. This tactic is common in black leaders especially those who propagate traditional black politics like Jesse Jackson Sr., Al Sharpton etc. Also, Obama often used his respect for the civil rights leaders as a political cue when addressing black voters. Sugrue (2010) has written that Barack Obama himself emphasized his place in history of civil rights at key moments during his long presidential campaign, most notably in one of the more extraordinary speeches of his career, at Selma, Alabama, on March 4, 2007, before a mostly black audience at an event commemorating the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Sugrue 2010: 13). In this message, Obama paid respect to the civil rights leaders and gave them credit for his own successes, that his education, his law degree his seats in the Illinois Senate and the US Senate were possible because these leaders made the sacrifice and took the lead for the African-American community to have equal rights to the American life.

Here too, Obama made biblical reference by calling the civil rights leaders as the Moses generation 'Moses generation', which included those southern civil rights leaders like Joseph Lowery, John Lewis, Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young whose lives had been, and still were, devoted to the black freedom struggle (King 2011: 66) and that these people have done ninety percent of the work. He then said the rest of the work must be completed by this generation which he called as the Joshua generation. This message is very important for the black community as it is a reminder that it is they that must take the responsibility to develop the community. But the most important here is how Obama phrased his message; he puts it in such a way that it sounds prophetic and encouraging for the black audience. Also, else during the election campaign, it showed that African Americans unlike many white Americans

have an active and conscious relationship with their own past rather than seeking mainly to escape it (King 2011: 66). Therefore, by making a connection with the civil rights movement this way, Obama skilfully projected himself as being comfortable being black. This, I would argue is a good way of connecting to black voters because as discussed in previous chapters, initially Obama was being questioned about his loyalty to his community, whether he was 'black enough' for their support since his blackness was considered as alien to American blackness as his father was not from America and for this reason, paying tribute to the civil rights movement, which is considered as sacrosanct in the black community, Obama was successful in gaining trust from black voters.

One of the past black leaders Obama drew inspiration from was Malcolm X, though he did not support Malcolm's propaganda. Obama has written in his book *Dreams from My Father* that he was impressed with Malcolm X whose act of self-creation he felt connected with. Sugrue (2010) has written that Obama's dalliance with Malcolm sparked his interest in black radicalism (Obama himself has also written this in *Dreams From My Father*) which, along with black separatism and race consciousness led Obama to New York's pan-African festivals, to Harlem's famous "Speakers' Corner" on 125th Street, to black nationalist bookstores, and, most memorably, to a campus lecture by Black Panther founder Kwame Ture (Obama 1995: 120-122, 139-140). However, Obama was not satisfied and did not feel the connection with black radicalism but as Sugrue (2010) puts it, though Obama never really embraced black radicalism, he remained, at least for a time, sympathetic to it (Sugrue 2010: 22).

Obama has often been compared with Martin Luther King, Jr. amongst black political leaders as many of their strategies run on similar lines. Both drew on the American school of pragmatism and modern philosophy as a way of thinking through the complexities of politics in America; they both shared a common concern for the poor, the working class and the marginalized voices of American society and were committed to grassroots organizing that yields revolutionary changes (Hill 2009: 24). Many of his speeches reflect the policies of Martin Luther King Jr. His March 18, 2008, address "A More Perfect Union" stands out as a descendent of King's theology and rhetoric (Frank 2009: 168). Martin Luther King Jr. also propagated and floated policies in which all races of America will unite and that one day the black

community will be fully integrated in the American life where everyone irrespective of which race they belong to will realise the American dream (King Jr. 1963). In relation to the way Obama resembled Martin Luther King Jr., Hill (2009) has also mentioned that at the beginning of his campaign, Obama employed the message of hope and change as his key slogans where he invoked many of the triumphalistic themes of the civil rights movement and in the rhythmic cadence spoke eloquently like the young black preacher from Ebenezer Baptist Church of old.

Therefore, as can be seen from the above discussions, Obama tries to make a connection with blacks through various ways and that he has several similarities with traditional black politics even though the way and style of executing policies differ completely. One important thing that must be mentioned here was his work as a community organiser in Chicago (before he went on to study law in Harvard) which exposed him to the brutal poverty that the black community is subjected to. This work helped him to connect with the black cause of coming out from poverty even though he framed his appeal for overcoming poverty as a more inclusive agenda and not just a black cause. Though Obama propagates the same campaigning style and political philosophies as the new black politicians, it was of extreme importance for him to make deeper connection with the black community. For this, the best way was to make connections with past black leaders and espouse black political style when speaking with the black community. But in the end, we find that his strategy worked and the argument made by Walters (2007) as mentioned before that if candidates had previously established confidence among black voters, based on their historical and cultural experience in the black community, black voters would most likely reciprocate by allowing the candidates to run on liberal universal themes, because there would be an unspoken understanding that such candidates could not be expected to run “Black campaigns” seems to be proven true because Obama went on to win the presidency with 95 percent support from the African-American community.

However, after a close study of Obama’s policy as had been done in Chapter 2, it is clear that the main difference between Obama and the traditional black politics is on the subject of white responsibility for racism in America. Obama, as was seen throughout his speeches and writings, has urged blacks to move on from the pains of the civil rights struggles and take responsibility on their own shoulders instead of

blaming the white community and waiting for them to make amendments. This is clearly the opposite of traditional black politics which propagate the black cause by highlighting the wrongs that the white community has inflicted on them and asking them to make changes. For traditional black politics, slavery and the civil rights movement played important roles in formulating the black cause while in Obama's and the new black politicians' policies, these have become secondary and appeals are made in a more universal themed pattern. Especially in the case of Obama, we see that he for most of the times vehemently campaigned that it is time to move on from the pains of slavery and the civil rights movements if the black community is to have real progress in America. From this, let us move on to a brief discussion on voters' perception of these types of black politics.

Traditional Black Politics versus the New Black Politics – Black and White Voters' Perception:

Traditional black politics, as we know, is greatly influenced by the civil rights movement. In the electoral politics, when black candidates espoused this type of politics, they mostly use racial issues as a central issue of their agenda. They mostly call upon voters from their community to come and support them so that if elected, they will try to fix the problems of the community through political forum. The politicians who propagate this type of policy are mostly a product of the civil rights movement. Since they were deeply involved in the movement, for them race becomes a very important and delicate issue. Most of the times, these politicians will blame white supremacy and prejudice as the reason why the black community is still so far behind in the social, economic and political sphere of America. They are right in doing so considering the history of America, of slavery and segregation. These politicians attain huge success in majority black districts and constituencies.

Traditional black politics makes black cause as the first and foremost agenda in its political agenda. One important characteristic of traditional black politics, is blaming whites for their current bad condition. Demand is made in the name of developing and uplifting the black community. Traditional black politics sought to fight vigorously against racial discrimination against the black community and try to achieve for all

blacks equal social, economic and political rights so that the community can develop and have its fair chance in living the American dream. Since racial discrimination is still present in today's America even though many steps have been taken to diminish this, traditional black politics will always be relevant in American politics in relation to the black community. Even though, the new black politics is gaining prominence in America, it is a necessity that traditional blacks be alive and active because as we know, the new black politics tend not to favour any specific race. Since appeal is made in such a way that it is characterized by universal theme where all races must come together and work together to uplift one another, with the current condition of racial issue especially towards the black community, traditional politics is something that the black community cannot and must never do without. However, to further integrate itself into mainstream American politics, the new black politics is also very important for the black community.

Considering white voters perception of these two types of black politics, it is clear that whites feel certain threat and mistrust if traditional black politics is given centre-stage. In majority white districts, black politicians following this policy have zero chance in winning the election. Even in jurisdictions where whites are less in population, they still do not have a chance in winning the white vote as they are too concentrated only in their own community. Apart from this, if a candidate is seen too closely attached to black cause, though he may make his appeal not so race-specific or purely race-neutral, whites are still very much sceptical about him. A good case is Jesse Jackson Sr. Who formed an interracial coalition 'the Rainbow Coalition' and got good support from other minority communities and some white votes, yet, his close association with the civil rights movement became a disadvantage for him. In the end, he could not win enough white support to win the nomination seat from the Democratic Party in 1988.

However, the opposite is with the new black politics. As have been discussed in Chapter 2, the main reason why black politicians transcend race is to make white voters feel at ease with their policies in order to gain their votes; and to make whites feel at ease, one must effectively downplay ones' own race. Since black politicians propagating this policy minimize their race to the extent that made them credible to whites, they can garner white support especially the liberal whites just enough for

them to win office. As discussed in Chapter 2 and in the earlier part of this chapter, many of them could win from majority white districts. Since they bring with them messages of hope and change in which everyone is involved, they are highly appreciated by their white supporters. According to Cohen (2010), these politicians embed in their campaigns and their elections in the notion that these are movements outside of traditional electoral politics for fundamental change in the country. This therefore, gives them credibility to white voters. At the same time also, since their policy is all inclusive, they easily draw other minority groups to their side as well. In relation to their own community too, they make sure that they inspire black supporters and often inject minimal racial cue to get their support. A surprising thing about the policy of transcending race is that, even though race is minimized, it is still his own community that gives him full support. Maybe it is a matter of pride and loyalty that motivates black voters to give solid support to candidates from their own community. Since there is significant progress made with the issue of racism in America as the years go by, therefore, transcending race or deracializing seems to become an important political strategy for blacks to succeed in mainstream politics of America. Though there were many other factors responsible like the economy, the two wars that America fought etc. that got Obama elected in the 2008 presidential election, there can definitely be an argument that deracialization as a political strategy is gaining relevance for minority candidates.

What can be drawn out from the discussion made in this chapter is that black politics have developed over time and adjust itself as per the requirement of the periods. Though it is without doubt that Obama is amongst the category of black politicians propagating the new black politics, he also follows some pattern of traditional black politics; that he made efforts to connect with the black community so that he would gain their trust and their solid support. However, it was the way he handled the racial issue that convinced voters from both the black and white community that he was a safe candidate for either community if he was elected that made many vote for him. From this, we can draw out the fact that white voters are much more supportive of the new black politics where the issue of race has been downplayed significantly.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Dianne Pinderhughes (2009) noted, “Whatever the outcome, and whatever the policy position of the new president, this election offers the opportunity to explore the framework of American racial politics and the challenge the American nation faces in seeking democracy” and true to this, race was an important issue in the 2008 US presidential election which led many scholars to pursue new thoughts about racial relation of America because of the election of a man belonging to a community most subjected to racism in the country. With the election of a coloured man to occupy the highest office in the country in spite of racism being an inherent problem in America, it is not a surprise that many questioned what this election signify for racial relation of the country and raised the possibility of America being post-racial. Even in particular relation to black politics, many saw the possibility of the decline of traditional black politics and the rise of a more pragmatic new black politics where minimizing the issue of race seem a better option for black candidates for political success.

Chapter 1 of this research have briefly highlighted the issue of racism in America and how race has been used as a political cue in presidential elections preceding the election of 2008. On mentioning these issues, it is clear that racism is an inherent problem in America and also that race and racism have been used as political cues to gain electoral success by candidates, be it at the local level, state level or national level politics. As we see in that chapter, scholarly work of Bobo and Charles (2009) in relation to racism in America has stated that overt racism and negative racial stereotyping have declined tremendously in America especially by the time Obama has contested for election. And this has been affirmed by Hill (2009b) who made an argument that Obama entered national politics at a time when overt racism both in statements and actions had passed from the scenes. With these studies on racism claiming that overt racism is declining in America, it is quite easy to assume the possibility of a post-racial era finally coming to America because a black man got

elected as the president of the country. This is particularly true when considering the perception of whites on this issue. Especially for whites, they feel that electing a black man to the highest office in America signals the notion that race no longer live as a barrier for black advancement; that blacks are now fully integrated into the American social, economic and political system and that racism is a thing of the past.

On examining whether Obama's election has confirmed the assumption that America has entered a post-racial era and the decline of the importance of race in American presidential elections, we have scholars like McWhorter (2008) suggesting the possibility of America becoming post-racial. He simply stated in his article in Forbes magazine that America is post-racial because of the election of Obama. He believes that America has become post-racist against black people and in concern with whether racism is still a serious problem in America he argues that this is no longer the case since he believes the election of Obama has proven that racism has taken a back seat. However many scholars seem to be against this argument of America finally becoming post-racial. In the introduction of this research, arguments given by scholars like Smith and King (2009), Parker et al. (2009), Pettigrew (2009), Tesler and Sears (2010) to name a few, have been highlighted and they have clearly rejected the possibility of America becoming post-racial because of Obama's election. Parker et al. (2009) have written, "Many pundits have concluded that since Obama won, we have now moved to a 'postracial United States' or defeated racism, but they do not consider that some nontrivial segment of the broader public might have been influenced by racism when choosing their candidates (Parker et al. 2009: 211)." Smith and King (2009) in particular have highlighted the fact that Obama himself offered a word of caution about America being post-racial or colour-blind society in the book *Audacity of Hope* and therefore argued that with racial disparities still persisting in American society, racial divisions will still be persistent in American politics. They believe that it is the multicultural challenge that still stands in the way of achieving post-racism and that it will be achieved only if Obama's universal programmes succeed in improving many of those patterns of material inequality.

Teasley and Ikard (2010) have written that the notion of a postracial society has been with Americans for some time which became a convenient tool of the political Right as a form of backlash to affirmative action policies enacted during the 1960s and the

1970s (Teasley and Ikard 2010: 413). They believed that, viewing Obama's election from the positive side, it is an effective encouragement for the black community for more participation in American politics to address the community's grievances and for reshaping their community for the better. However, Teasley and Ikard (2010) argue that racial issue will remain because of the realities of gross racial/ethnic disparities and inequalities and the worsening economic conditions, not only for black communities but also for the majority of Americans in general (Teasley and Ikard 2010: 420). Smith and King (2009) have also pointed out this reality in their work and mention that the continuing and severe racial gaps in material well-being encompasses virtually every dimension of life, from economic well-being to health to housing to education to the criminal justice system (Smith and King 2009: 26). This divide is, as we know, the most visible and sharpest between blacks and whites. Majority of blacks are still economically unstable and the problems mentioned by Smith and King (2009) like health-care, education, employment, criminal justice and others are the biggest problems in the black community. As long as these problems are not solved successfully racial divide will remain as visible as it is now in America.

Also, as the 2008 presidential election clearly shows, there were many racial cues that were injected both in the Democratic primaries and the general election. Chapter 3 of this research has clearly highlighted how racism was visible and present in the election. Especially during the campaign, racially coded language and racial subtext were used to great effect by the opposition (Clinton and McCain/Palin) to tap into racial prejudices of white voters and also produced wildly disparate voting patterns by race, especially in the primaries (Lusane 2009: 68, Rachlinski and Parks 2009:41). Apart from this, as was given in that chapter, the voting patterns also clearly show that racism is still an inherent problem which Obama's candidacy or his election did not diminish. According to exit polls, majority of whites (55 percent) voted for the white candidate, John McCain while Obama received only 43 percent of white votes (Todd and Gawiser 2009: 29). Also, the voting percentage that Obama received from the white voters is only two percentage points increase from what John Kerry received in 2004 and about the same as Clinton won in 1996 (Lusane 2009: 68). This clearly shows that Obama gained nothing significant from the whites to show that whites are post-racial in their voting. It can also be suggestive of the fact that whites are still

reluctant to vote for a black candidate; that racial prejudice, even though not overtly expressed anymore, is still present in majority white voters' perception. At the same time however, as much as 43 percent whites voting for Obama (particularly the solid support he got from the youths) shows that race no longer plays divisive role as a determinant for white voters as it used to in electoral politics especially in the younger generation, suggesting a positive alteration of racial relation in America. These therefore clearly demonstrate that the importance of the issue of race in presidential election has not yet declined and will not so even if candidates are solely from the white community because minorities will remain important voting blocs for candidates.

Though the election of Obama created much hype about the possibility of better racial relation in America, the expectation has gone down tremendously when compared to the polls taken soon after the 2008 election. Gallup Poll conducted a day after Obama's election i.e. 5th November, 2008 shows that as much as 33 percent say that the election is one of the most important advancement of blacks in the past 100 years while 38 percent believed that it is the second or third most important (Newport 2008). Then in 2009 a survey was conducted by CBS News/New York Times which also shows that 59 percent of African-Americans - along with 65 percent of whites - now characterize the relationship between blacks and whites in America as 'good' as compared to less than a year ago when just 29 percent of blacks said race relations were good. The percentage of blacks who say race relations are bad, meanwhile, has dropped from 59 percent last July to 30 percent today (CBSNews 2010).

However, by 2011 this trend has begun to decrease slowly. According to the Washington Post-ABC News poll conducted by telephone from 13-16 January 2011 among a random national sample of 1,053 adults, fewer blacks - 51 percent (same as 2010 but far lower than the 75 percent polled who anticipated better racial relation in 2009) - believed that Obama's presidency has improved race relation while 47 percent of whites now say that racial equality has been achieved and this too is lower than 2009 when most whites had also anticipated Obama's bringing about a thaw in race relations (Cohen and Craighill 2011). On discussing whether Obama's administration has improved racial relation in America, Cohen and Craighill (2011) have written, "Despite high public expectations that Barack Obama's presidency would improve

race relations in the country, barely more than a third of Americans now say his tenure has made things better in this area, according to a new Washington Post-ABC News poll.” This shows that even though Obama’s election was symbolically important for highlighting the improved condition of racial relation of America, nothing much has changed because of his election or his presidency. And so while of course Obama has not brought about an end to racism, he has nonetheless transformed the way that blackness works in contemporary US race politics (Pitcher 2010: 319).

On examining whether the election of Obama means a maturation of deracialized policy in black politics as well as the end of black politics, it would be safe to say that the concept of deracialization will be for some time more prominent than traditional black politics especially in presidential elections. This is because majority voters are still white Americans and since race is still an important factor in voters’ perception about candidates as mentioned before, candidates from minority communities still need to play safe with the white electorate in order to achieve real political success.

With the particular case of whether black politics has come to an end with Obama’s election, we have writers like Matt Bai (2008) suggesting the possibility of it when he discussed about Obama’s candidacy and what it means to the black community and black politics. According to him, the generational transition that is reordering black politics didn’t start this year and that it has been happening, gradually and quietly, for at least a decade, as younger African-Americans, Barack Obama among them, have challenged their elders in traditionally black districts. Bai (2008) believes that the 2008 Democratic nomination fight accelerated that transition and thrust it into the open as never before, exposing and intensifying friction that was already there. Not only Bai but Juan Williams, a conservative black commentator also wrote in the Wall Street Journal that Obama’s election is both an astounding political victory – and the end of an era of black politics (Williams 2008).

However, the end of black politics simply because a black man got elected to the highest office in the country is not feasible. Though writers like Bai (2008) and Williams (2008) may have made their arguments based on the facts that traditional black politics no longer plays significant role as it used to and the success of more younger black politicians who minimize their race not only for their political success

but also for addressing problems of the black community, bluntly claiming the end of black politics does not seem possible given the current context of racial relation in America. Though significant numbers of blacks have improved their social and economic standing, condition for majority of blacks is still very bad in America. The black poverty rate still hovers between 20 and 25 percent and remains more than twice that of whites; the class profile of blacks is still weighted toward the bottom; while median income rose dramatically for black women in the 30 years between 1974 and 2004, it fell for black men; and those blacks who do achieve middle-class status face much greater difficulty than whites in passing that status along to their children (Burnham 2009: 80). Since this is the condition that many blacks are still subjected to, addressing their problems in a deracialized manner will not be enough for the community to uplift itself. Especially in majority black jurisdictions, there will be times when using race-centred political policies will be more helpful for candidates in order to succeed. African-Americans elected to public office in majority black districts and jurisdiction will continue to embrace racial themes and issues in their campaign and governing style (Perry 1996: 195). This argument of Perry (1996) however may be a different case in national politics. Taking presidential elections as a special case, it is true that black candidates cannot be race-specific in their approach if they aspire to succeed but at the same time they still need to apply subtle form of traditional black politics to gain support from black voters. So, this proves that traditional black politics will not come to an end with the prominence of deracialization in black politics.

Lusane (2009) has commented that it is important to view black politics in its horizontal dimension rather than evoking a vertical hierarchy that locates civil rights above black nationalism or vice versa because the politics of civil rights, black nationalism, pan-Africanism, conservatism, integrationism and socialism compete with and complement each other as they vie for acceptance as paths to democracy and justice for blacks (Lusane 2009: 69). This also stands true for the more race-based traditional black politics and the new race-neutral black politics. They both are an essential and important part of black politics and the prominence of the new black politics in recent years will not end the run of traditional black politics all together. In chapter 4 the evolution and development of black politics have been discussed in

detail and as we see, till today, the legacies of the past black struggles through which black politics evolve still holds important place in the black community. As this is the case, it is important for black political leaders to give importance to this as well. For gaining support from their own community, as have been discussed previously, no matter how race-neutral their political strategies are, they must pay due attention to what their community values in order to gain maximum support from them. As was discussed in chapter 4, even Obama made sure that he gave due importance to the civil-rights leaders and their struggles even though he propagated race-neutral, universal approach to bridge racial gaps and solve the problems of America.

Therefore, instead of traditional black politics coming to an end and being overtaken by a new type of black politics, scholars like Harris (2009) have argued that Obama's election has symbolized the maturation of black politics; from the protest tradition through the process of incorporation as players in the political system to the possible beginnings of normalization and he readily welcomes this new black politics. Sinclair-Chapman and Price (2008) believe that the 2008 Obama campaign provides an opportunity to examine the trajectory of black politics in contemporary America and that the campaign represents an extension of and a departure from traditional black presidential politics that has typically focussed on black inclusion and incorporation into American governance, garnering concessions to black policy demands, improving black material conditions, and establishing the pursuit of presidential power as the right of all citizens (Sinclair-Chapman and Price 2008: 744). They have also mentioned that though Obama's administration does not mark certainty of how black politics will fare, the need for independent black activism will not dissipate. In the words of Perry (1996), though deracialization is likely to be an important part and an enduring part of the political landscape in American politics, it will supplement but not replace traditional black politics.

In Chapter 2 of this research a discussion on the concept of deracialization and Obama's policy on race have been made and there, it has been highlighted that Obama did indeed follow a deracialized policy and that the concept of deracialization is gaining prominence in American mainstream politics when candidates from minority communities are involved. As discussed before, the voting pattern especially in relation to the white vote in the 2008 presidential clearly demonstrates that the

importance of race in contemporary American politics has not and will not in the foreseeable future decline simply because of the growth of influence of deracialization. Though Obama succeeded in executing deracialization by winning the presidency, his opponents trying to present him as a racial candidate in order to raise racial fear and white resentment both during the primaries and the general election also clearly demonstrate that no matter how much a minority candidate tries present himself as a race-neutral candidate to win white vote, the contenders will always look for ways to inject race into the election. Some white candidates still feel the need to appeal to white voters along racial lines and drive a wedge between black and white voters (Clayton 2007: 60).

Racial cues will remain important political tools for candidates to achieve success unless and until minorities fully integrate themselves into American politics, which is an unlikely case especially in concern with the black community. So, even if deracialization becomes more prominent in contemporary American politics and more and more minority candidates propagating the policy are elected in office, it will not be enough to diminish the importance of race in electoral politics be it in black politics or mainstream American politics. Apart from the reasons stated before, one important thing is that minorities are important voting blocs and candidates will always try to win maximum support from them because, as Rachlinski and Parks (2009) put it, voting pattern in the United States remain wildly racially stratified and the 2008 election clearly demonstrates this with 95 percent blacks supporting Obama and majority whites voting for McCain. And finally, when examining whether the 21st century will be the end of racial politics in America, it can be concluded that this will not be so. The arguments given before can stand as viable arguments for this proposition. Unless and until racism itself is rooted out from the American society, racism in politics will not end and America has a long way to go to rid itself of the institution of racism. As was discussed in introductory chapter of this research, white Americans have now shifted to applying implicit and subtle racism which makes it all the more complicated to address the issue of racism.

All these arguments therefore, suggest that America is yet to attain a post-racial era and is not post-racial simply because a black man who ran a deracialized campaign got elected to be the chief executive of the country. Racism will remain a problem in

America and will not be removed anytime soon. However, with racial attitude undergoing significant change, especially overt racism being on the decline, it is clear that Obama's election demonstrates an important transformation of race relation in America; that the election has made real a form of racial progress that many Americans thought virtually impossible (Smith and King 2009: 33) and has generated a feeling of optimism across race, class, and gender lines thereby making many to reassess the basic assumptions about the ways that 'race matters' in the 21st century (Teasley and Ikard 2010: 412). Obama's election has also led to a new type of racial consciousness among Americans according to Ford (2009). It suggests that whites are beginning to make distinctions between those blacks whom they associate with negative racial stereotypes and those whom they see, increasingly, as an ethnic group – people with slightly different accents, culinary styles, and traditions, but otherwise assimilated to mainstream norms of behaviour (Ford 2009: 46). In the political arena too, this ethnic group is also represented by those young and well educated blacks who graduate from top universities in the US and who are no longer making appeal by propagating race-based policies for electoral success. These new black politicians of whom Obama is also categorised are welcomed by white voters as they do not pose a threat to white supremacy as has been discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

Therefore, we can finally conclude that though significant changes are evolving in American politics that concerns racial issues, without achieving racial equality, a post-racial politics or post-racial America will be for many more years a distant cry. According to Rich (2008), Obama is not post-race but rather the latest chapter in the ever-unfurling American racial saga. An effective Obama administrative on solving the social and economic problems of the country however will greatly help in minimizing the polarisation of racism and further improve racial relation of the country but assessment of this success will only be possible after the end of his presidential reign. Therefore, as Hutchings (2009) puts it, "A 'postracial' tomorrow may well be on the horizon, but that future has clearly not yet arrived (Hutchings 2009:939)."

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