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**THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN BARACK
OBAMA'S EXCEPTIONALITY AND HIS MITIGATED
EFFECT ON RACIAL PREJUDICE**

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Dedication

To the memory of my father,

*To my beloved family especially my daughters and my husband as well
as my mother, my sisters and my brother.*

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to gratify Allah the Almighty for giving me the strength, the perseverance and the patience to complete this humble work. Nothing would have been possible without His help. Thus, may Allah be praised.

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Abstract

Although the United States has undeniably done significant progress in the struggle against racism, racial prejudice persists. Nevertheless, the 2008 historical election of the first Afro-American Barack Obama as president of the United States was widely acclaimed as evidence of American post-racialism and even of the toll of racism.

Although Obama seemed the ideal person to confront the race problem, he could obtain only mitigated results. This research examines the state of racial prejudice in the American society in relation to Obama's candidacy, election and presidency. It also strives to assess the president's personal responsibility in its persistence. At the core of this thesis is a tentative explanation of the contradiction between Obama's exceptionalism and his mitigated results in the struggle against the race problem. This research concludes that Barack Obama certainly bears some responsibility in the persistence of racial prejudice. Nevertheless, his personal burden needs to be tempered with in view of the impossibility of the task due to the presence of insuperable external factors on which the president himself had little or no ascendancy.

Résumé

Bien que les Etats-Unis aient indéniablement fait des progrès importants dans la lutte contre le racisme, le préjudice racial persiste. Néanmoins, l'élection historique en Novembre 2008 du premier Afro-Américain comme président des Etats-Unis a été largement acclamée comme une preuve du post-racialisme Américain et même de la fin du racisme. Bien que Barack Obama semblait la personne idéale pour confronter le problème de race, il ne put obtenir qu'un bilan mitigé en la matière. Cette recherche examine l'état du préjudice racial dans la société Américaine en relation avec la candidature, l'élection et la présidence d'Obama. Elle s'efforce également d'évaluer la responsabilité personnelle du président dans sa persistance. Au cœur de cette thèse est une tentative d'explication de la contradiction entre l'exceptionnalité d'Obama et ses résultats mitigés dans la lutte contre le problème racial. Cette recherche conclut que Barack Obama a certainement une légère responsabilité dans la persistance du préjudice racial. Toutefois, son poids personnel doit être nuancé en vue de l'impossibilité de la tâche due à la présence de facteurs externes insurmontables sur lesquels le président lui-même a peu ou pas d'ascendance.

ملخص:

مما لا شك فيه أنه وعلى الرغم من التطور الكبير الذي شهدته الولايات المتحدة في مكافحة العنصرية، لا تزال هذه الظاهرة متواجدة لا محالة. غير أن الانتخاب التاريخي لأول رئيس للولايات المتحدة من أصول أفرو-أمريكية في نوفمبر 2008، قد تلقى تزكية الأغلبية باعتباره دليلاً على مرحلة ما بعد العنصرية الأمريكية بل ونهاية هذه الممارسة. إذ وقعت على عاتق الرئيس الجديد المسؤولية الكبيرة المتمثلة في القضاء على آثار التحيز العنصري؛ وقد كان باراك أوباما يعد الشخص الأمثل لمواجهة الإشكالية العرقية، غير أنه لم يحقق سوى نتائج متباينة في هذا الشأن. يتناول هذا البحث بالدراسة وضعية التحيز العرقي في المجتمع الأمريكي وارتباطه بترشح باراك أوباما وانتخابه وكذا تقلده منصب الرئيس، كما يصبو إلى تقييم مسؤولية الرئيس الشخصية في استمرارية هذه الظاهرة. ويعد جوهر هذه الأطروحة محاولة شرح وتفسير للتناقض الحاصل ما بين كون أوباما حالة استثنائية، منفردة من جهة والنتائج المتباينة التي حققها في مكافحته للإشكالية العرقية من جهة أخرى. وتُظهر نتائج البحث أن باراك أوباما يتحمل فعلاً شيئاً من المسؤولية في استمرارية هذا التحيز العرقي، ويعزى تباين تأثيره الشخصي في استحالة تحقيق المهمة، لوجود عوامل خارجية معيقة من الصعب تجاوزها، قد لا يملك الرئيس إلا شيئاً من السلطة عليها، أو يتعذر عليه ذلك تماماً.

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Introduction

The United States of America has a particular experience with race. The classification of human beings into categories according to phenotypical or physical traits has been and continues to be a crucial issue for Americans. Though scientifically invalidated, the notion of racial categories continues to exist socially. The belief into this notion led to the emergence of racial prejudice, which represents pre-formed opinions about individuals based on their race. Being a nation of immigrants that developed its creed on the principle of equality, the United States should have been the only nation free of racism. Logically, the United States should have been an ideal society where all would be equal. This hope came from the fact that all Americans were immigrants except Indians. Indeed, what composes what is now the United States was an incredibly vast and almost empty land. Initially, its population comprised a relatively small number of Native Americans when compared with the immensity of the land.

Thus, diverse people came to this Promised Land from different parts of the globe, but they were at the beginning majoritarilly Europeans. The fact that these new Americans were all immigrants implies that theoretically no racial group could claim neither the ownership of the land nor the ancientness to legitimate any forms of domination. Nevertheless, neither their immigrant status, nor their past persecution nor their affirmed commitment to equality prevented the new Americans from developing racial prejudice. Native-Americans, African-Americans but also other

Europeans experienced racial prejudice at the hands of the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant immigrants.

Racial prejudice has developed since colonial times, so it is deeply engrained in American mentalities. Though clashing with the American ideals, the majority of the American people have never really questioned its existence for centuries. In the twentieth century, however, several domestic but especially international factors combined to lead to an attack on the phenomenon. The Americans' abandoning of isolationism gave the nation greater international exposure with a need to enhance its aura. The rise of some awareness of the wrongs of racism further contributed to this changing attitude. Thanks to the Civil Rights Movement and an arsenal of laws fighting racial discrimination, racial prejudice declined in the American society; however, it did not disappear. The struggle is still raging. A turning point in this saga is the election of the Afro-American Barack Obama to the American presidency in Nov. 2008. This is indeed an important step in the struggle against racism. Celebrated wrongly as the symbol of the end of racial prejudice in the United States, this event was, however, over-estimated. Great expectations derived from this historical election. On the newly elected president's shoulders fell the burden of erasing a centuries-old racism. Obama has indeed an extraordinary potential to do so due to his identity, experience, character, intelligence and popularity. This work comes to nuance the president's responsibility in the persistence or elimination of this social plague.

Furthermore, the importance of this work lies in the fact that first, it tackles one of the most serious and enduring issues that has confronted the United States, which is the problem of race. Second, another significance of this research lies in the fact that historically the election of the first black president has been a crucial step for

the United States. It embodies the progress that has been achieved in the struggle against racial prejudice. Nevertheless, public opinion in the United States and in the world has put insuperable barriers for Barack Obama simply on the basis of being the first black president. He was supposed to eradicate the enduring racial plague as if by magic. Our work comes to nuance these expectations.

Predominately belonging to the social studies, this thesis is more accurately an interdisciplinary research work as the political aspect is also significant. Two variables guide this research: the first one is the persistence of racial prejudice in the American society; the second one is the coming to the highest office of government in the United States of a black individual with the election of Barack Obama. More than that, Obama represents the first president issued from a colored minority. Much ink has been poured on Barack Obama's effect on race relations. Among researchers and public opinion, the most widely held view is that, as the first black president, Barack Obama has the responsibility to eradicate the race problem. According to them, it depends solely on his power of conviction and actions. Others, a minority, assume that Obama stands powerless in face of the race problem. It is not in his resort to fulfill such a gigantic task. Other critics pretend that Barack Obama has no intention to solve the race problem; he has other priorities.

This work comes to nuance all these views by balancing Obama's responsibility with factors that even to such an exceptional potential may prove insuperable. Moreover, researchers in general tend to concentrate on Whites as the perpetrators of racial prejudice. Indeed, a majority of people take for granted that the holders of prejudice are necessarily the white people while the victims of prejudice are the colored ones. This work comes to discard such misconception; not only does the white majority hold prejudice against colored racial minorities, but the latter

themselves nurture prejudice towards the white majority as well as towards each other. Therefore, this dissertation objectively ponders on the multiple facets of racial prejudice in order to avoid always pointing an accusing finger at Whites and to insist that even other “races” are guilty of the same offence.

In addition, this thesis aims at showing that first the historic election of the first black president does not mean the end of racial prejudice in America. Second, it aspires at demonstrating the extraordinary potential that Barack Obama represents as the ideal person to fight racial prejudice in the American society. Nevertheless, it is also its aim to show that despite this potential, stronger obstacles stood in the road. In the meantime, this work intends to evaluate Obama’s real determination and motivation to reduce racial prejudice. Thus, it further provides an examination of his intentions, initiatives and deeds. Based on these considerations, this dissertation revolves around the following questions: To what extent could the election of Barack Obama lead to a decline of racial prejudice? Does Barack Obama have the assets to lead a struggle against racial prejudice? Has he provided enough efforts to meet the expectations of the American people? Why could he achieve only mitigated results in the fight against racial prejudice?

Examining the impact of the coming of the first African-American president on the persistence of racial prejudice is the central aim of this research. To do so, one will assess the potential of Barack Obama for decreasing racial prejudice. In fact, despite his exceptional potential for reducing racial prejudice, he is likely to achieve only mitigated results. This work assumes that a part of the responsibility would certainly be attributed to him but external factors, factors independent of the president’s will, seem to be stronger in explaining the persistence of racial prejudice.

To answer these questions, this thesis adopted several methodologies of research. First, the researcher opted for a descriptive approach. Indeed, the core of the work turns around describing a social phenomenon, which is racial prejudice. It also describes how the election of an Afro-American affected that phenomenon. The use of statistics and public opinion polls reinforces this description. Second, in many respects, this research is also analytical. Indeed, it analyses Obama's assets that make him the ideal person to confront the race problem. In this context, his speeches and diverse writings are examined through discourse and textual analyses. To assess his actions, other primary sources, including several laws and executive orders, are also scrutinized. Finally, this work provides an analysis of the reasons for his mitigated effect on racial prejudice. As for the style of citation, this dissertation strives to conform to the MLA format. This style seems the most appropriate given the field of research.

To complete this research work, the use of primary sources is crucial. Barack Obama's speeches and autobiographies form central sources to this thesis. First, Obama's first autobiography entitled *Dreams from my Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* published in 2004 represents a major source for this work. In this important book, the author narrates his life throughout his childhood. It proved to be useful for this research since one could understand his personality and see how the events of his life affected his perceptions. Second, another autobiography is used though less extensively; it is *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, which was published in 2008. This book is not narrative like the previous one, but it is more thematic. Here, Barack Obama ponders on several important issues. The section on race proved highly useful to understand his perception of the subject. Likewise, Obama's speeches represent powerful sources for

this research work. Accordingly, two books offering transcriptions of Obama's most important speeches proved to be particularly valuable in this work: *Barack Obama in his Own Words* (2007) as well as *Words on a Journey: The Great Speeches of President-Elect Barack Obama* (2009). These sources prove particularly interesting to assess Obama's opinions, intentions and personality. In addition, official documents including executive orders come to reinforce the hypothesis advanced in this dissertation.

Furthermore, in order to assess American mentalities and attitudes, this work relied on different surveys. Indeed being aware of the general lack of reliability and validity of such sources, this dissertation attempted to focus on polls undertaken by credible organisms of research and/or involving university researchers. In addition, nowadays polls are more and more reliable since interviewers do their surveys anonymously, thus aiming at the subconscious of the respondents. Two surveys provided further insights for this study: The National Research Council's *Measuring Racial Discrimination*, edited by Rebecca M. Blank (2004) and the Pew Research Center's valuable survey "Inside Obama's Sweeping Victory" (2008).

Besides, various secondary sources are used to give some substance to this work as they provide views and analyses of historians, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and various scientists as well as articles of journalists. For instance, in order to have insights into the life of Barack Obama, this work relies on three interesting biographies. Indeed, Martin Dupuis and Keith's Boeckelman's *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics* published in 2008; Carl Pedersen's *Obama's America* published in 2009 as well as Joann Price's *Barack Obama's: A Biography* published in 2008 provide valuable information on the background and experiences of Barack Obama. These prove valuable in centering Obama's personality

and showing his extraordinary potential for fighting race prejudice. Moreover, three other sources prove valuable in this research to assess the state of race prejudice in nowadays America. Tim Wise's book *Between Barack and a Hard Place, Racism and White Denial in the Age of Obama* published in 2009; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Daniel Dietrich's article "The New Racism: The Racial Regime of Post-Civil Rights Era America" published in 1999 as well as the highly interesting documentary "Race: The Power of an Illusion" published in 2003 all prove crucial in this research work. These sources provided deep insights into the dynamics behind the persistence of the race problem in the U.S.A.

In order to answer the questions raised in this research, five chapters are necessary. The first chapter, which is entitled: "Examining Racial Prejudice and Groups' Categorization," clarifies the key notions of the work. Of course, the core of this section revolves around racial prejudice, which is the central notion of this thesis. Clarifying the important terms represents an attempt to remove any ambiguity for the rest of the dissertation. Explained notably are how race became such an important issue for the American society and how the belief in the existence of distinct races among human beings led to the social plague that is racism, which implies the hierarchization of such categories. In addition, this chapter ponders on the racial groups' categorization into majority and minority. It is judicial to discuss as well the implications behind that categorization and the relationship between majority and minority groups in order to better grasp the complexities of the American society in relation to the issue of race.

The second chapter, which is entitled: "American Experience with Racial Prejudice before the Coming of Obama," traces back the origins of racial prejudice as well as its evolution in the American society. In fact, this section explains that racial

prejudice developed hand in hand with the new nation that was the United States of America even though race was not such a significant criterion in the early colonial days. Furthermore, it provides a historical overview of the importance of racial prejudice in the American society. This chapter intends to describe the major changes that affected the race problem, a process that started in the twentieth century leading to the attack on racism and its relative decline. Thus in this section is described the state of racial prejudice before the election of the first Afro-American president. This description is necessary in proving one's hypothesis since one would be able to assess the president's impact on the race problem.

In the third chapter entitled "Assessment of President Obama's Potential for Decreasing Racial Prejudice" are examined all the assets that make of president Obama the ideal person to lead the struggle against racial prejudice. For this purpose, this section provides a description of Obama's eclectic identity, personality and background as well as his experience with race. Then it discusses the degree of identification of electors with Obama in order to evaluate the potential of the president as a convincing leader in the struggle against racial prejudice.

The fourth chapter is entitled "Barack Obama's Involvement in Reducing Racial Prejudice." This chapter examines first Barack Obama's vision of race relations to assess the president's view of the race problem. Then, the next session ponders on his efforts to decrease racial prejudice through his speeches as well as his actions. Finally, in view of the efforts provided by the president, one can evaluate his actual achievements in the struggle against racial prejudice.

The fifth and last chapter entitled "Assessment of the President's Responsibility in the Persistence of Racial Prejudice" represents the culmination of

this research work. One should note here that racial prejudice has persisted in the American society despite the highly symbolic election and presidency of a black individual. This chapter aims at assessing Barack Obama's personal responsibility in the persistence of the race problem. In addition, one will also examine the role of external factors to balance that responsibility. Indeed, the president should not carry alone the weight of the continuing persistence of racial prejudice. In fact, other factors intervened that nuance that responsibility.

Chapter One:

Examining Racial Prejudice and Groups' Categorization

Introduction:

Before entering into the core of the research, it would be useful to clarify some notions that are central to this dissertation. Broadly speaking, explanations of race and racial prejudice form the core of this chapter. The intent here is to unveil the ambiguity that may arise from common understanding of these terms. Indeed, some of the terminology used in this paper is relatively controversial; hence the need for understanding the implications behind key terms. Thus, as a preliminary step to the explanation of racial prejudice, which represents the backbone of this paper, an analysis of notions of race and ethnicity will be provided. This chapter would be incomplete without a tentative explanation of the widely used term of racism. Then, focus will be on racial prejudice and its distinctiveness from racial discrimination; both being forms of racism. Furthermore, the terms minority and majority status are of particular importance when explaining relationships between racial groups. A

discussion of these theories of coexistence between racial groups in society is to follow with a description of minority-majority relationships.

I. The Significance of Race:

1. The Scientific Evaluation of Race:

1.1 Defining Race:

On the onset, the notion of race has taken considerable significance when portraying the American experience. Since its creation, it has not ceased to be central to any understanding of the American society, hence the importance to define this inescapable term. A variety of definitions of the term exists among the scientific community. They are more or less accurate and more or less neutral. *The Oxford Dictionary of the English Language* proposes: “A human race was understood as a distinct category of human beings with physical characteristics transmitted by descent” (1626). Rather neutral, this definition describes the “human race” indirectly distinguishing it from the animal race. According to it, what makes individuals of different races distinct are “physical characteristics.” The importance of the physical appearance in categorizing human beings is visible through the majority of definitions and is indeed a key feature of a faithful depiction and understanding of the notion of race. This aspect is also present in famous anthropologist Ashley Montagu’s definition: “A subdivision of a species the members of which resemble each other and differ from other members of the species in certain traits” (920). Nonetheless, the scientist does not limit his definition here to physical traits but he implicitly acknowledges the existence of other features like, for instance, intellectual or cultural ones.

Less neutral is geneticist Gordon Edlin's definition. The latter claims: "A race is defined as an arbitrary subclassification of a species" (504). An important component of this definition is the adjective 'arbitrary', which highlights the absence of scientific rigor and consistency in this classification. Therefore, if one recapitulates, the human population is arbitrarily divided into categories called races according chiefly to physical traits. Scholar Ian F. Haney Lopez provided another attempt to give a thorough definition of race, "I define a "race" as a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry" ("Social Construction" 3). Here, the author combines both the biological and social aspects allegedly contained in the notion. As such, it quite accurately approaches the true meaning of the term. The concept of race evolved in importance throughout American history. As the following sections will attempt to demonstrate, the validity of such notion is by now largely controversial, but its significance persists in the American mind.

1.2 Past Endorsement of the Concept of Race:

To begin with, what is worth noticing is that racial prejudice originates from a concept that has no scientific foundations. Indeed, nowadays the scientific community overwhelmingly denies the very existence of "races" among human beings. This has not always been the case; in the past, scientists sanctioned the existence of race. It would prove judicial at this stage to make a review of the scientific stance as far as race is concerned. Race is not a concept that has existed since the beginning of humanity. Rather it is, comparatively to the length of human history, a relatively new invention. Historians generally date back its origin to the fifteen-century coinciding with the wave of European exploration of the world, which entailed the discovery of new lands and subsequently of peoples new to the Europeans. The peoples

encountered sharply contrasted with the Europeans in terms of physical appearance, culture, and ways of living and thinking. It seems that it is from these encounters with this diversity of humanity that the concept of race emerged, gaining ground within the scientific community but also among the common people. Accordingly, William Javier Nelson pointed out:

Basic definitions of race in the US concerning Africans and their descendants and whites have been in existence since colonial times and have been remarkably similar over the years. (318)

Other historians and sociologists suggest that the creation of the concept was even more recent, dating back to the eighteenth century (Fredrickson as qtd. in Barrera 313). Among the most influential scientist that endorsed the existence of races is Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a German physician, physiologist and anthropologist. He was allegedly one of the first to acknowledge the concept of race. In his work entitled “De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa,” translated “On the Natural Varieties of Mankind,” published in 1776, he divided humanity into four then five categories: “Caucasian”, “Mongolian”, “Ethiopian”, “American” and “Malay” with Caucasian being considered as the ideal type. According to Blumenbach, all other human groups were a departure and degeneration from this ideal (Winddance Twine 459).

This represents the core of the problem as these scientists not only divided humankind into races but they hierarchized these categories setting the foundations for the inequality of human beings. Indeed, they believed generally that the races were unequal in terms of development, beauty, intelligence, temperament and morality (Winddance Twine 459). One immediately notices that these criteria are very difficult

to measure, and any approach that attempts at setting the normality or the ideal type along these criteria would be purely subjective. In fact, Blumenbach and others not only instilled in the common people that distinct races of human beings existed but more dangerously that these races were inherently unequal. They considered the Caucasian race originating from Europe as the ideal human type. For them, that race was deemed superior. Following this reasoning, the other racial categories were supposed to be less developed, less intelligent, less aesthetically beautiful and of an inferior character. Since the acceptance of the existence of race by the majority, other researchers have attempted to prove this inferiority by a variety of tests like the Intelligent Quotient Test, comparison between skull sizes, comparison between temperaments by analyzing different reactions to the same situation.... A full list would be very difficult to provide. A satisfactory overview is provided by Lopez who noted: “along the way, various minds tried to fashion practical human typologies along the following physical axes: skin color, hair texture, facial angle, jaw size, cranial capacity, brain mass, frontal lobe mass, brain surface fissures and convolutions, and even body lice” (Social Construction 13). Here is, however, a sample: John Tyndall, then incoming President of the Association for the Advancement of Science stated in his inaugural address in 1874 that:

Thus it happens that the European inherits from twenty to thirty cubic inches more of brain than the Papuan. Thus it happens that faculties, as of music, which scarcely exist in inferior races, become more congenital in superior ones. (qtd. in Tyndall 379)

Here, Tyndall uses skull size as a proof of the inferior intellectual capacities of the other races. He illustrated their alleged backwardness in the following terms: “Thus it happens that out of savages unable to count up to the number of their fingers, and

speaking a language containing only nouns and verbs, arise at length our Newtons and Shakespeares” (Tyndall 379). Nevertheless, what is common is that the different experiments all validate the supposed reality of racial inequality.

1.3 Justifications of Racial Categorization:

This belief engrained even more since it provided a strong justification for the Europeans’ intentions. The establishment of that racial classification entered into the mould of the Europeans’ purpose to control the rest of the world. This racial hierarchization greatly eased the conquest, colonization and submission of African, Asian and American areas. The machine of white supremacy was in march. The fact that some races were ranked as inferior gave the Europeans the moral justification for the conquest of darker-skinned populations, the Caucasian race being the one bound to dominate the world. With the inherent inferiority of the other races scientifically sanctioned, the normal course is the submission of these races to the superiority of the white, Caucasian race. The theory of social Darwinism best exposed by British philosopher Herbert Spencer in the late nineteenth century greatly strengthened this reasoning. The motto of this theory is “survival of the fittest” (Marks 5). Based on Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution and natural selection, Social Darwinists contended that the white race is the most evolved; therefore, it is the one which should survive; the other inferior races are bound to subdue or to perish (Marks 6). This is a natural state of fact; this is what happens in nature every day. The strength of this belief lays on this argument; that it is something normal, natural to accept the division and ranking of human races. More than that, it provided a justification for the massacre or extermination of inferior races.

Another thinking gained widespread support among the Europeans; it is the

well-meaning, condescending civilizing intentions of the Whites. The English poet Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" best expressed this idea.

Bestowed with an allegedly superior civilization, the Europeans undertook a civilizing mission towards the dark-skinned peoples. The idea is to help these backward, primitive and pagan peoples to develop. Although the encountered peoples had a culture and a religion, the white Europeans either ignored or down looked them.

Illustrating this thinking, Kipling wrote:

Take up the White Man's burden--
 Send forth the best ye breed--
 Go bind your sons to exile
 To serve your captives' need;
 To wait in heavy harness,
 On fluttered folk and wild--
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
 Half-devil and half-child. (Kipling)

Appearing in Kipling's poem is the primitiveness and the wickedness of the encountered races and the sense of superiority displayed by the whites. "Half devil" refers to the vile character of the encountered peoples whereas "half-child" refers to their immaturity and lack of intellectual development. It was believed that it was the duty, the responsibility ("burden") of the white man to civilize the primitive peoples of Africa and Asia. Genuine or not, the allegedly noble intentions of the white men are also clear in the poem:

To serve your captives' need; (...)
 To seek another's profit,

And work another's gain (...)

Fill full the mouth of Famine

And bid the sickness cease. (Kipling)

According to Kipling, Europeans undertook the conquest of the other races for the interest and benefit of the conquered peoples. For them, Europeans aimed at getting rid of famine, disease and other plagues. Though manifestly based on racial categorization and classification, the idea gave a moral virtue to the whites' intentions. These two theories were among the most popular justifications of racial classification and conquest of less developed races. They further entrenched the belief into the existence of distinct races within humankind and the inequality between them.

1.4 Reasons for the Existence of Racial Construction:

In the present time as in the past, the same principle has remained. Racial classification perpetuates white domination not over other people of other nations only but upon racial groups in the same society as well. The preservation of the white supremacy makes of racial classification a resisting habit. Racial classification serves the interests of the white majority. Accordingly, George Yancey pointed out:

Race in the US is socially constructed. Racial identity is not purely based on physical characteristics. Rather racial categories are created in ways that usually support majority group members. Thus racial identity can change as societal racial definitions are transformed. (197)

Thus, racial classification responds to a precise aim; this is why it is changing. If it were a scientific classification, there would be no inconstancy and variation in the classification. Sociologist Mario Barrera further confirms the groups' concerns for

their interests. He stated, “Race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (310). Thus, the white majority justifies and perpetuates its domination by this categorization and hierarchization of individuals based on their physical appearance.

1.5 Shortcomings in the Scientific Argument about the Existence of Race:

The division of humanity into races, though a widely supported view, has in fact nothing to do with science. Indeed, the majority of the past scientific works that sanctioned the existence of races have proved to lack scientific foundations. Firstly, this reasoning is based on a fallacy: it links physical features like the color of the skin to inherent character, intelligence and other mental capacities (Pricken and Rutherford 163). This reasoning is unscientific. Doctor Michael Yudell confirmed this aspect in the following unambiguous terms:

The belief that the peoples of the world can be organized into biologically distinctive groups, each with their own physical, social, and intellectual characteristics is understood by most natural and social scientists to be an unsound concept. (13)

In fact, there is no correspondence between physical features and mental capacities as proved by a number of later researches. Indeed, phenotypical features like the skin color, the shape of the body, the hair texture... proved irrelevant as a basis for racial classification. As George Henderson, professor of human relations, pointed out there is no reason to expect consistency of variation in phenotypical characteristics across gene pools. Furthermore, a factor as determinant as the number of existing races is a cause of disagreement among the scientific community in particular and among

people in general. If scientific grounds really determined racial categorization, it would be easier to determine the exact number of races without any friction between the different theories. The haemo-typologist Jacques Ruffié emphasized this impossibility in December 1972 when he stated: “Now, in man, there is no such thing as race. That is why, despite numerous and rigorous studies, nobody has ever been able to agree on how humans should be divided up into races” (qtd. in Guillaumin 101). As the early opponents to the concept of race have pointed out in the 1930s, race simply refused to provide unambiguously different types (Henderson).

In addition, the strongest proof against the concept of race is that it has no biological foundation. Indeed, geneticists proved that there is no such a thing as race since there are no distinct genetic make-ups between the alleged races (Fitzpatrick, Glasgow 111). All human beings can interbreed; i.e.: each human being can successfully reproduce with the others. Accordingly, in an effort to combat racial prejudice, Professor of Genetics Gordon Edlin reasserted that:

All human beings are members of the same species *_homo sapiens_*. A species is defined as a population of organisms that interbreed with one another in nature; members of one species do not interbreed with individuals of other species. (504)

Not only that but also that in reality there is more variation within the same “race” than between the “races”. Genetically speaking, more variation occurs within racial groups than between racial groups (Nelson 320). Studies such as that of geneticist Richard Lewontin have proved that as much as 85 % of variation occurs within the same race (qtd. in Rattansi 75; Jorde and Wooding 28). In other words, we are more likely to find more differences between Whites themselves, for instance,

than for example between an African-American and a White. Another genetician confirmed this reality:

Generally, for any population as much genetic variation exists within a given human population (Scandinavians for example) as exists between very different human population (Scandinavians and black Africans for example). (Edlin 505)

Therefore, in terms of genetic make-up, two members of the same “race” may be more different than two members of different “races” (Witherspoon et al. 358).

Some scientists like Edlin reproach the scientific community and ordinary people to focus on the few differences between human beings rather than on the similarities, which are much more numerous (505). Overall, these new scientific discoveries gave a serious blow to the concept of race. Nowadays, hardly any scientist believes into the validity of race. However, the belief into the concept of race persists among ordinary people in spite of its lack of scientific foundation. Regularly, scientists’ voices rise against the perseverant belief into the notion on the part of common people. For instance, Montagu claimed quite firmly:

There is no such thing as the kind of “race” in which the layman believes, namely, that there exists an indissoluble association between mental and physical characters which makes individual members of certain “races” either inferior or superior to the members of certain other “races”. (926)

On the opposite, later scientists have striven to prove the monogenesis of humanity. Indeed, human beings have a common ancestry; they belong to a single species. The UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice adopted this idea

when it stated, “All human beings belong to a single species and are descended from a common stock” (UNESCO Declaration 3). From this common origin, it entails an undisputable equality between all human beings as further stated in Article 1 of the same Declaration:

They are born equal in dignity and rights and all form an integral part of humanity. All peoples of the world possess equal faculties for attaining the highest level in intellectual, technical, social, economic, cultural and political development. (3)

Theories of racial inequality are more and more discarded as having no biological basis; this is further acknowledged in the Declaration: “Any theory which involves the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior [...] has no scientific foundation and is contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity” (3). However, the idea of race has become part of “common sense” no matter its scientific credibility. It means that whatever strong arguments and proofs may be against the concept of race, the latter is too deeply engrained in the mentalities to cease to exist overnight. Here, the role of the society is determinant in the construction as well as the persistence of the concept as the next point highlights.

2. The Social Significance of Race:

2.1. The Social Construction of Race:

The 1950 UNESCO Statement on Race sustained in Article 14 that, “‘race’ is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth” (3). Since race has no biological foundations, it is in society that lays its strength. Deprived of scientific underpinnings, the notion of race exists socially. The belief into the existence of races

is deeply rooted in mentalities. This is visible through the public discourse; indeed, the term race is widely used by the society. Richard T. Schaefer states that, “in its social sense, race implies that groups that differ physically also bear distinctive emotional and mental abilities or disabilities” (12). Some factors aggravate this public acceptance of the existence of races as Sociologist Ali Rattansi put it: “These categories circulate in general discourse, media discussion and everyday social interaction allowing the language of race to permeate common sense” (171). Indeed, the term race is used everywhere, unchecked. One could find it in encyclopedias, dictionaries and schoolbooks. For instance according to Webster’s dictionary, there are three races: the Caucasian or white race, the Negroid or black race and the Mongoloid or yellow race (“Definition of Race”). In *A Civic Biology*, a textbook used for more than 30 years in American high schools, the author wrote:

At the present time there exist upon the earth five races or varieties of man, each very different from each other in instincts, social customs, and, to an extent in structure. There are the Ethiopian or negro type, originating from Africa; the Malay or brown race, from the islands of the Pacific; the American Indian; the Mongolian or yellow race [...] and finally, the highest type of all, the Caucasians, represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America. (Hunter 196)

Needless to say that people are likely

to believe claims written in official documents. These claims would entrench deeply into the mentalities of people especially the younger minds. Thus through different means like the mass media, public discourse and official documents, society further sanctions the existence of distinct races and permits its perpetuation. Even if a

majority of people would be aware that race is a concept that exists only through society, sociologist Charles A. Gallagher claims that “this does not change the perception among most individuals that race is responsible for traits like intelligence, criminality, motivation, behavior or athletic prowess” (13). It means that even if people would know that race is a social phenomenon, they would not renounce the association between the race and its attributed features. The lack of consistency in the attribution of traits to different races does not lead to its rejection by the society. Criminality for instance is wrongly said to be linked to a person’s race. In fact, as proved by studies, the environment plays a more crucial role in determining these traits than the supposed appurtenance to a given race (Jones 2). Lopez further pointed out the existence of race at the social level when he stated:

Race is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions. . . [R]eferents of terms like Black, White, Asian, and Latino are social groups, not genetically distinct branches of humankind. (Lopez, “Social Construction” 3)

Here, this description proves interesting on several grounds. First, the sociologist denies the scientific nature of race. Nevertheless, the author emphasizes the reality of the idea. He discarded its qualification as “illusion”. The force of the concept lies in its imprint on society. Furthermore, the “racial groups” usually described are referred to simply as “social groups” denying the biological basis of the term “race” and highlighting the importance of race at the social level. It is true that as some observers pointed out, the scientific demise of the notion of race does not prevent it from affecting society to a substantial extent. Even though one may consider race as a myth

or a fallacy, one should not neglect its imprint on society. Accordingly, Professor of sociology George Yancey and Professor of philosophy George Yancy emphasized this reality: “Although racial identity is a biological myth, there are very real social and economic consequences to racialization” (Yancey and Yancy 198). Thus, despite scientists’ efforts to reject the existence of race from a biological point of view, race persists as a powerful socially constructed reality.

2.2. Difficulties and Inconsistencies Raised due to Racial

Classification:

Due to the lack of scientificity of the concept of race, there arose a certain number of difficulties and inconsistencies in the categorization of human beings into races. Indeed, men fabricated racial classification, and for categorizing people, they need to rely on unreliable characteristics that are physical traits. This selection is purely social and has nothing to do with scientific rigor. Confirming this, sociologist Mario Barrera noted:

Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so called phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial classification is always necessarily a social and historical process. (310)

To begin with, the fact that racial categorization rests heavily on physical traits leads to difficulties in classifying people that do not fit the mould. For instance, how should one classify a white child born to a black woman? Secondly, the increase of diversity is another problem. Indeed, how to categorize individuals of mixed lineage? For instance, an infant born of an Asiatic and a Black would be difficult to categorize into the known “races”. This difficulty increases if this infant marries an American Indian.

What should be their offspring's racial appurtenance? Tiger Woods, the famous golfer, provides a good illustration of this diversity that characterizes the American society. He is ¼ Black, ¼ Thai, ¼ Chinese, 1/8 Caucasian and 1/8 American Indian (Schaefer 29). Public opinion often categorizes him as African-American, and in view of his diverse lineage, it seems somehow restrictive. This categorization does not give a faithful image of his mixed and thus rich origin. Nowadays, it is more and more difficult to classify people into races because of the growing number of mixed unions.

2.3. Evolution of Racial Categorization:

One major drawback to the validity of the concept is that racial categories are not static. The concept has evolved. Definitions of racial categories are not universal and vary from one country to another. In the USA, these have changed, throughout history. Indeed, criteria for membership to that or that race have changed highlighting the unscientific character of the notion. Membership to the white or Caucasian race has been the most controversial. Indeed, the categorization into the white race comprised only those who are “pure” Whites i.e.: without any drop of other races' blood (Harvey 15). This highly selective group admitted only those who can prove a completely white ancestry. Nevertheless, the white population has hidden a controversial fact. In reality, a considerable number of Whites have cheated concerning their identity and lineage; indeed, they would hide their black ancestry. One sociologist R. P. Stuckert suggested that: “a sizable percentage of the white population possesses African ancestry, although this would be secret and unacknowledged” (qtd. in Nelson 319). The categorization into the white race has changed through history.

To assign a race to black people, the early Americans applied the “one drop”

rule according to which they considered any individual with some black ancestry as Black. This is problematic because it categorizes the individual as black even if the percentage of black blood is very low and that the person is completely white in appearance (Schaefer 15, Davis 5). On the opposite, early Americans defined membership to the Indian race by a certain percentage of Indian blood (Tallbear 88). Furthermore, confusion occurs nowadays by considering the Hispanics as a racial group “because of the broad phenotypical variation within Latino community” (Barrera 319) and it entails a subject of contention by considering the Hispanics as Whites or not. This lack of consistency and objectivity in the classification is a further mark of bias and as such of a lack of scientificity. Next, it would be useful to tackle the frequent confusion between “race” and “ethnicity”.

II. The Confusion between Race and Ethnicity:

1. Definition of Ethnicity and Comparison with Race:

Frequently, there is among the common people confusion between the terms race and ethnicity. Accordingly, the idea of race mixes with the common conception of ethnicity in people’s minds. Multiple attempts have been made by scientists and sociologists to define the notion of ethnicity. Indeed, a variety of definitions exists. Nevertheless, none proved indisputable so that there exists no commonly agreed-upon definition. Still, some common elements are present in the majority of descriptions. First, overwhelmingly the proposed definitions contain the cultural aspect. For instance, sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein defines an ethnic group as “a culturally defined group of people” (qtd. in Barrera 319). Of course, this definition fails to be accurate as it contains a vague term, which is “culture”. Similarly, ethnicity

refers to “the ethnic quality or affiliation of a group, which is normally characterized in terms of culture (Betancourt and Lopez 631).” Therefore, the basis of ethnicity concerns perceived cultural differences. Ethnicity has to do more with culture while race, as previously seen, has to do with phenotypes i.e.: physical traits. Thus, ethnicity encompasses and takes into consideration all what is cultural like traditions and customs, the common language, shared beliefs and values.

Besides, other propositions add the “descent” and/or “community” elements in an attempt to provide definitions that are more accurate. Accordingly, scholars Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan conceived ethnicity as including “a culturally and descent-based sense of themselves as communities” (qtd. in Barrera 319). Likewise, Fredrickson proposes defining ethnic group as “one marked by a feeling of community based on common culture and/or common descent” (qtd. in Barrera 319). Furthermore, the distinctiveness, the physical separation and minimal social interaction between different ethnic groups seem also to be a significant element of ethnicity. Accordingly, Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Eriksen noted: “ethnicity is an aspect of social relationships between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction” (12). Moreover, sociologist Joe R. Feagin describes ethnic groups as “a group of persons which is socially distinguishable or set apart, by others or by itself, primarily on the basis of cultural or nationality characteristics” (qtd. in Corlett 44). An interesting aspect contained in this definition is that the ethnic group may choose to isolate from the rest of the society. Consequently, the rest of the society does not impose this separation. Besides, Montagu provides a kind of mixture of all the previously cited components. He conceived the ethnic group as:

one of the number of breeding populations, which populations together

comprise the species *Homo Sapiens*, and which individually maintain their differences, physical, or genetic and cultural, by means of isolating mechanisms such as geographic and social barriers. (“Concept of Race” 927)

In addition, a valuable attempt to define ethnicity in its modern sense has been provided by Ali Rattansi:

It [ethnicity] assumes the possession of a relatively high degree of coherence and solidarity amongst a group of people who have a conception of common origin, shared culture and experiences, common interest and participate in some shared activities in which common origin and culture are regarded as significant. (88)

Though at first sight this definition may seem complete, it comprises some terms that may be problematic like solidarity. The term is not valuable for all the ethnic groups. Ethnicity proves to be a problematic term as it is based on a concept which is itself very broad and difficult to delimit. Indeed, what is culture? An incredibly large panel of definitions of the term exists. These take into account such diverse criteria as origin, language, habits, beliefs, customs and traditions as part of a culture. A further question arises: which degree of common culture is necessary to consider a group of people as an ethnic group. In the above definition, the author answered a “relatively high degree of coherence”; this fails to give us a precise evaluation. Thus, one has to point out that; though relatively interesting definitions of ethnicity exist as seen previously, they almost all fail to provide an acceptably accurate description of the notion. Generally, they center on vague and/or abstract components such as “culture”, “solidarity”, “sense of community”, or even “descent” which are themselves

disputable.

2. Differences between Race and Ethnicity:

To begin with, a significant difference between the notions of race and ethnicity is that the latter “is more achieved while race is typically ascribed” (Romero 246). This means that a person is not born with a culture; he/she rather achieves it. On the opposite, as soon as he/she is born, a person is generally classified into a given race and thus, it is something that is given to an individual without any willingness or intention on his/her part. This feature is responsible for the fact that the categorization of a person into a given race, which relies on unreliable criteria like physical traits, is sometimes badly lived by the person. In addition, this categorization does not always reflect an individual’s own feeling of appurtenance. For instance, a completely white person may identify with the white race; nevertheless, because of the “one drop” rule and a minimal black ancestry, society classifies the individual as Black. In addition, many American Indians who identify with the Indian race were classified into other races due to the blood quantum rule and a failure to prove their Indian ancestry. This unscientific categorization of individuals into races they might not identify with is a problem that does not concern ethnicity as the latter is achieved, and most of the time, the individual has some liberty of choice that is completely absent in the assignation of race. This leads to a greater acceptance of one’s ethnicity than of one’s appurtenance to a given race.

An additional interesting point about ethnicity is that it can melt away to some extent; on the contrary, race is a feature one does not choose nor is it a feature one can eliminate. In the process of assimilation, one’s ethnicity may melt away. This means an individual may consciously choose to give up part of his culture. The individual

comes to such decision intentionally and voluntarily or under pressure. To immerse into the American society, groups have to relinquish large parts of their ethnicities. On the opposite, an individual may do whatever he can; he is always going to be part of the same race even if he changes the color of his skin as seen nowadays with the case of late Michael Jackson. Nevertheless, ethnicity cannot be totally abandoned. It always leaves a mark on an individual. One can never totally get rid of one's cultural heritage, however hard one tries.

3. Problems Emanating from the Confusion between Race and Ethnicity:

Although significant discrepancies exist between the two notions, people often intertwine race and ethnicity and use one for the other. This confusion is at the root of some inconsistencies when coming to classifying a given group into racial or ethnic groups. In the USA, the categorization of two groups has been problematic. First, inconsistency has dominated the categorization of Jews. Indeed, some sociologists have categorized the Jewish Americans as a racial group, others as an ethnic group and still by others as a religious group (Hochschild 71). Thus, where is the reality? The appellation refers directly to religion. Thus, one can say that this is a religious group. However, religion is part of culture and as a consequence, religion dictates one's customs, beliefs, values.... Therefore, one can consider the Jewish as an ethnic group. The problem here is that many definitions of ethnicity highlight common origin or nationality as one of the characteristics of an ethnic group. This cannot be applied to Jewish Americans as they do not come from a single nation but are scattered, dispersed. Historically, there was no home nation for the Jews until the creation of the state of Israel in the previous century. There remains the categorization of the Jewish Americans as a racial group. Though this is the most common one, this categorization is indisputably erroneous. First, of course as seen previously, race is an

invention. Second, even if one accepts the existence of “races”, the Jewish people would not constitute a race of their own. They do not have distinctive enough physical traits to be differentiated from the white race. This difficulty in classifying the Jewish population not only highlights the inconstancies of the definitions of race and ethnicity themselves but also the particularity of some groups that cannot enter into any mould.

Another example is the Hispanic group. Is it a racial or an ethnic group? Its classification has been problematic. The American society has long classified the Hispanics as a racial group. In the meantime, it considered them as belonging to the white race (Prewitt 7). In the past, censuses have categorized them as White for a certain period. There is an increasing tendency, however, to set them apart from the rest of the Whites highlighting their physical distinctiveness and their alleged inferiority. Again, the claim of the non-whiteness of this group is something that is now socially constructed and has no scientific basis. In the meantime, their classification as ethnic group highlighting what they share in common is not to some extent a realistic picture of the reality (Pollard and O’Hare 7, Barrera 320). Indeed, if an ethnic group is supposed to have a high degree of cohesion and solidarity as seen in common definitions, then Hispanics do not constitute an ethnic group. Indeed, they come from diverse origins and are more diverse culturally than a typical ethnic group. Generally, the fact of enclosing all the nationalities into an umbrella appellation does not please the Hispanics themselves; they tend to stress and claim their differences. For them, a Puerto Rican has little in common with a Mexican (Schmidt). The differences between the Hispanics may seem subtle and negligible for anyone outside this group, but they are significant for the concerned. The cohesive factor in the group is the Spanish language, which constitutes a meager linking device. Thus, because of

the inconsistencies of the definitions of the terms race and ethnicity, the categorization of certain groups in the United States has been problematic. Nevertheless, one should not confuse between race and ethnicity because these are very distinct notions.

4. The Reluctance to Abandon Race despite its Shortcomings:

Despite the blatant shortcomings of the notion of race and its indisputably unscientific nature, it resists any elimination of its use. Indeed, the term continues to have a great significance in the American society. Ordinary people continue to consider it as a pertinent way of categorizing people in the society. Race is still present everywhere though it became less visible than in the past because of its general condemnation. An unexpected reality is that the notion is still popular among some members of the scientific community as Professor Jenifer Hochschild noted, “some scientists and medical doctors are still contesting that race is nothing but a social construction” (71). Some scientists are attempting to keep the notion in life for unknown reasons. Barrera’s metaphorical depiction of this phenomenon is judicial; he noted:

The present-day popularity of the term “racialization” is one way that such scholars have found to pump new life into a discourse that should have been given a proper burial years ago. Indeed, the demise of “scientific racism” has left its bones all over the academic landscape, and researchers find themselves continually stumbling over the fossilized remains. (318)

In addition, political circles continue to sanction the term. Indeed, Congress and the

courts still refer to the term whenever needed. Many scientists, though, urge the total abandoning of such archaic and scientifically unsound notion. Among them are Montagu and Barrera. Generally, these scientists suggest its replacement by the term “ethnicity” which is morally more acceptable. Nevertheless, as seen previously, ethnicity is also controversial in view of its vagueness. However, it proves to be a more neutral term that does not entail any underlying classification of social groups.

III. Examining Racial Prejudice:

The clarification of this notion deserves a particular attention as it represents the backbone of this paper. Racial prejudice is subtle since it is invisible; it is not something that one may see. Indeed, it exists in the mentalities. Thus, it is a notion whose existence and evaluation are problematic. Sociologists frequently associate racial prejudice to individual-based racism as it occurs at the level of individuals.

1. Description:

Prejudice is an attitude. It is “the prejudgment, usually negative, of another person on the basis of membership in a group” (Cacioppo and Freberg 505). It means that individuals form an opinion about a person prior to the deep knowledge of that person. Thus, are taken into consideration visible features, and these features are associated with mental capacities or behavior based on a superficial evaluation of the person. Here, the membership of the person to a given racial group is to determine the judgment of the person. The person’s belonging to a given race is to influence the other people’s evaluation of his/her intellectual capacities and temperament. This pre-formed opinion may be positive or negative. This aspect of racial prejudice is very

important to stress, as it is often believed that prejudice always concerns negative opinions. Indeed, they may concern exaggerated or made up defects but also exaggerated or made up virtues. In fact, racial prejudice is very close to stereotype. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority of sociologists and other scientists describe racial prejudice through a negative lens. For instance, prominent sociologist John Dovidio and psychologist Samuel L. Gaertner portray prejudice as “an unfair negative attitude toward a social group or a member of that group” (101). Psychologists Christian Crandall and Ruth Warner provided a close definition: “a negative evaluation of a social group or a negative evaluation of an individual that is significantly based on the individual’s group membership” (137). Both definitions contain the same essential ingredients that one generally finds in most definitions of racial prejudice. First, analysts generally agree that prejudice is an attitude. Besides, for these sociologists as for others, prejudice is by essence negative. Lastly, one may direct this evaluation or attitude towards a single individual or an entire group.

2. The Formation of Racial Prejudice: Origin

In view of its omnipresence in society, it would be useful to examine the origins of racial prejudice. Is it something human beings are born with? Is it learned? Is it universal or does it concern just a minority in the society? From where does it originate? The tentative answers to these questions will provide a better understanding of this notion. Thus, racial prejudice is a pre-formed opinion about an individual or a group based on his racial appurtenance. Nevertheless, is prejudice innate or learned? Sociologists and other scientists unanimously agree to deny the innate nature of prejudice. Indeed, human beings are not born prejudiced as Sociologist Angelo Corlett pointed out, prejudice is learned not innate (35). If prejudice were indeed something individuals develop during their life, in which manner and at which stage

are these mechanisms “learned”? Sociologists and psychologists generally agree that prejudice develops early in individuals’ lives and that this acquisition is an unconscious process. For instance, Psychologist Helen Mc Lean confirmed this aspect when she asserted: “[t]his early identification with the racial attitudes prevalent in the group to which an individual belongs is of course unconscious” (145). Other members of the scientific community such as sociologists or psychologists advance similar theories. For instance, Simo Virtanen and Leonie Huddy consider that: “from a social learning perspective, the affective base of prejudice is acquired early in life as part of childhood socialization” (316) Indeed, early education is fundamental. It is in childhood that are sown the seeds of adulthood. Anything that is learned in childhood leaves a deep imprint on the psyche of an individual. This is the case of prejudice. Furthermore, the formation of prejudice is an unconscious process. Indeed, as asserted by Mc Lean, early in their life, individuals adopt unconsciously the prejudice that their racial group holds towards other racial groups. Thus, there is a consensus about the early acquisition of prejudice. Nevertheless, other factors such as the personality and the adult environment play undeniably a role in the process. Reviewing the scholars’ findings on the matter, American sociologist Herbert Blumer stated:

Thus, some scholars trace the complex feelings back to innate dispositions; some trace it to personality composition, such as authoritarian personality; and others regard the feelings of prejudice as being formed through social experience. (3)

In addition to the role of the society and the personality in the formation of prejudice, the author mentioned here innate dispositions. Likewise, he also advanced the adult environment as another factor leading to the formation of racial prejudice. By adult environment, scholars Virtanen and Huddy mean the work setting and the place of

residence (316). Thus, various factors may trigger the formation of racial prejudice.

3. Motives behind the Existence and Perpetuation of Racial prejudice:

Several theories attempt to explain the motives behind the existence of racial prejudice. The two theories that remain the most popular among sociologists and psychologists are that racial prejudice serves to maintain group position and that it is used to discharge tension. First, in the American society, the white racial group dominates. Indeed, this group enjoys a certain number of privileges granted more or less explicitly on a racial basis. To preserve its supremacy, this group has developed racial prejudice towards the other racial groups to maintain them in an inferior position. Confirming this view, Blumer stated, “As such, racial prejudice is a protective device. It functions, however short-sightedly, to preserve the integrity and the position of the dominant group” (5). Next, equally popular is viewing prejudice as an outlet. Therefore, people usually experience various emotional states such as stress, fear and hostility. In this way, developing racial prejudice represents a way to eliminate or at least attenuate these feelings. Anthropologist H. Scudder Mekeel pointed out this aspect:

To our own society and culture the most significant and self-evident fact about race prejudice is that it is socially sanctioned and learned. It is a ready-made and culturally normal outlet for at least mild forms of hostility, fear, and superiority. (qtd. in Mc Lean 145)

An interesting aspect in this description is the cultural normality of racial prejudice. This is disputable as this was perhaps so in the past, but nowadays it is far from being the case. On a similar basis, Mc Lean observed: “these attitudes are the result of specific personal attempts to discharge tension by way of racial feelings”

(146). Generally, it is true that individuals in society experience more or less high degrees of stress and tension, and they use race prejudice to release those negative feelings. In addition, another source of racial prejudice is economic insecurity (McLean 145). The white majority undeniably experiences this feeling when it feels economically insecure. It tends to consider other racial groups as rivals and scapegoats for this insecurity. One should note here that other racial groups (other than Whites) might develop race prejudice because of economic insecurity.

Finally, many scholars emphasize the “normalcy” of prejudiced attitudes. For them, prejudiced individuals are normal persons without any deviation of the personality or without any wicked nature. Famous anthropologist Gordon Alport first advanced this idea. He asserted: “prejudiced attitudes are not necessarily the result of a hateful ideology, or that of a limited intellect or a disordered personality” (qtd. in Witterbrink 306). Thus, contrary to a widespread belief, it is inexact to state that only deviant individuals hold prejudice. One needs to stress at this point an aspect of racial prejudice that people often overlook; it is that it is not the attribute of the white race only. Other racial groups may be prejudiced against the Whites or even against other racial groups that are themselves considered as inferior by the white majority. As a result, the white majority has also suffered and is still suffering from prejudice, though at much lesser extent than the other racial groups. Sociologists commonly refer to this phenomenon as reverse racism. Moreover, there is a general tendency in the American society to ignore inter-minority racial prejudice. Thus, racial prejudice is widespread in the American society, and ordinary people hold it regardless of their racial appurtenance.

4. The Changing Nature of Prejudice:

Racial prejudice has evolved. This is the theory held by the majority of scholars. Racial prejudice is no longer the same as in the past. Experts advance that from an open, obvious, conscious form, it turned to an implicit, unconscious form. Illustrating this belief, Dovidio and Gaertner asserted, “Prejudice can occur in its blatant, traditional form, or it may be rooted in unconscious and automatic negative feelings that characterize contemporary forms” (104). Nowadays, prejudice has become more implicit. “Implicit” means that race prejudice has become less visible, less direct. For Dr. Bernd Witterbrink, implicit prejudice means that prejudice occurs “without being aware or having control” if it (306). This joins Dovidio and Gaertner’s description cited above of implicit prejudice as “unconscious and automatic.” Of course, to say that race prejudice has become more implicit does not mean that traditional forms of prejudice do no longer exist. A debate is actually taking place among scholars over the extent of old forms of prejudice that remain. The general tendency among these is to advance that old prejudice is declining even disappearing while newer forms are flourishing (Quillian 312).

IV. Distinguishing Between Racial Prejudice and other Close Concepts:

1. Prejudice vs. Stereotype:

Sociologist Linda Krieger defined stereotypes as “cognitive mechanisms that all people, not just prejudiced ones use to simplify the task of perceiving, processing and retaining information about people in memory” (qtd. in Wellman 43). One may describe stereotyping as a categorization system. This phenomenon consists in categorizing individuals based on their group appurtenance to ease one’s memorization process. This is a natural process. Indeed, stereotyping facilitates the

brain's processing of information. Stereotypes are "central to normal cognitive functioning" (Wellman 43). Human cognition is organized in such a way that it predisposes to stereotyping. All people stereotype. People, in general, have a natural tendency to think in social categories. The latter simplifies the world and makes it predictable. It is necessary and inescapable (Dovidio and Gaertner. 280). Instances of stereotypes are numerous. For instance, according to a 1994 survey, three-quarters of African-Americans believed that Whites are "insensitive to other people" (Waller xix). In addition, 42 % said that Asian-Americans are "unscrupulously crafty and devious in business" (xix). Other commonly-held stereotypes about racial groups are that Blacks tend to be lazy, stupid, filthy and sexually potent. People view Jews as thrifty and unscrupulous. Arabs and Muslims are seen as all being terrorists if not particularly violent. The American society tends to view Asian-Americans as hard working and of an intelligence superior to the average. As visible through these examples, stereotyping does not only concern the white population but even other people do have stereotypes. Generally, a majority of people tends to neglect this matter-of-fact.

The underlying problem with stereotyping is overgeneralization, i.e.: there is a tendency to attribute a feature held by a minority or even a majority of individuals within a group to all the individuals of the group. Indeed, the accuracy of stereotypes varies but experts most often view them as overgeneralizations. One example of widely-held but unfounded stereotype is the black people's inferior intelligence. Though recent researches have proved the invalidity of such opinion, this stereotype still perpetuates. Likewise, it is not because a minority or a majority of Irish people are troublemakers that the whole population of Americans of Irish descent is so. This highlights perhaps the most latent feature of stereotype as being resistant to

rationality. It means that even if evidence is brought to prove the invalidity of stereotypes, they tend to remain.

Another problem of stereotyping is the minimization of similarities and the maximization of difference (Barentsen 40). Indeed, people tend to minimize what individuals share in common and magnify the differences between them. Stereotypes focus upon and thereby exaggerate differences between groups. Similarities tend to be overlooked or disregarded. For example, one can notice that among African-Americans, identity as an American is more salient than racial background. In other words, African-Americans are more American than African. This is the case of other racial groups. Arab-Americans have more in common with the rest of the Americans than with the Arabs of the Arab World. Nevertheless, the process of stereotyping implies to highlight the differences as judged more important than the similarities. This discussion of stereotyping highlights the problem generated by racial categorization, overshadowing the fact that human beings are more alike than different.

Another shortcoming with stereotypes is minimizing the negative aspect of stereotyping by stressing its normality. To say that it is a natural process undermines the dangerous potential of relying largely on stereotypes. As a matter-of-fact, stereotypes exist at the unconscious level. Their activation is made at the implicit or unaware level. This alleged lack of control can lead to the dangerous reasoning that one cannot hold people responsible or accountable for their stereotypes, their prejudice and even for their discriminatory behavior (Corlett 37). The fact that stereotyping occurs at the unconscious level minimizes people's active role in developing them. As a result, through the argument that stereotyping is a normal process, psychologists naturalize racial prejudice.

A final trouble is the occasional contradiction and ambivalence of stereotypes. There exists, or existed in the past, contradictory stereotypes existing simultaneously. These stereotypes reveal ambivalent attitudes towards groups (Rattansi 123). Attitudes towards other groups tend to vary. Indeed, stereotypes reveal contradictory views towards other groups. Interesting instances of these are Blacks and Asians. While Blacks are often portrayed as a lazy, good-for-nothing group, they are also praised for their athletic prowess and physical strength. Similarly, Asian-Americans are positively seen as “intelligent, capable, ambitious, hard-working, mathematical, skillful and self-disciplined” (Maddux et al. 74-75). Nevertheless, negative stereotypes exist about this group. Indeed, they are also viewed as “cunning, sly, selfish, nerdy, and lacking interpersonal warmth and kindness” (Maddux et al. 75). These stereotypes reveal a mixture of opposite feelings like hostility, antagonism and admiration for the same group. If stereotypes were reliable, unbiased and faithful to reality, there would not exist contradictory clichés circulating at the same time.

When understanding the difference between prejudice and stereotype, it would be useful to stress the fact that, as stated in the definition, all people stereotype; yet, not all are prejudiced. All people categorize people to facilitate their understanding of the world, but not all have these stereotypes affect positively or negatively their opinion or judgment of other people. Thus, prejudice as the *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism* defined is “usually linked to negative stereotypes held about an out-group and applied to behavior directed at members of that group, regardless of whether or not they fit the group stereotype” (Mania et al. 74). Consequently, it is a kind of condemnation without trial and this is what is the most damaging as far as prejudice is concerned. Thus, stereotypes are a prerequisite to the formation of racial prejudice. An individual cannot be prejudiced if he does not first adhere to stereotypes. Dovidio

and Gaertner pointed out this concomitance between stereotypes and prejudice; they noted:

Stereotypes, which are overgeneralizations about a group or its members that are factually incorrect and inordinately rigid, are a set of beliefs that can accompany the negative feelings associated with prejudice. (Dovidio and Gaertner 101)

Nevertheless, while a majority of people automatically holds stereotypes that are more or less harmless, negative feelings and attitude accompany prejudice. Accordingly, psychologist Richard Redding asserted:

A prejudice goes well beyond a stereotype to include hostility and ill will toward the stereotyped group, irrational prejudgment, an unwillingness to modify one's stereotypical beliefs based on a new or contrary information, and discriminatory beliefs or practices. (290)

In fact, while stereotypes can remain at the subconscious level, prejudice is somehow conscious. Moreover, a significant fact about prejudice is that it resists any contradicting information. The individual goes on with the same attitude despite the existence of blatant evidence of the misjudgment.

2. Racial Prejudice vs. Racial Discrimination:

Racial prejudice and racial discrimination are sometimes used indiscriminately one for the other. Still, the difference is quite clear-cut. While racial prejudice refers to thoughts, racial discrimination involves acts. Sociologist Lincoln Quillian noted this distinction when he stated, "Unlike prejudice, which is an attitude in people's heads, discrimination is present in behavior" (300). As far as the notion of

discrimination is concerned, there is generally a consensus among scholars; indeed, we find more or less the same definition. Defining discrimination is not as tricky a task as defining prejudice. Racial discrimination means that individuals are not treated in the same way on the basis of their racial appurtenance. Rights and privileges are granted to some and denied to others simply according to their race. For instance, Quillian proposed: “Definitions of discrimination emphasize unequal treatment among racial groups” (300). In addition, the National Research Council (NRC) proposes a dual definition. First, according to the latter, racial discrimination is “differential treatment on the basis of race that disadvantages a racial group” (39). Secondly, a subtler and more unusual definition of discrimination is: “treatment on the basis of inadequately justified factors other than race that disadvantages a racial group” (NRC 39). While in the first definition, the central role of race in discrimination is clear; in the second, any unequal treatment that disadvantages a racial group is considered as racial discrimination even if the racial motive is not clear and the justifications are inappropriately advanced. The first definition being quite widespread poses no problem whereas the second one seems controversial.

A distinctive feature between prejudice and discrimination is the association with power in the latter. There can be no discrimination without authority. Indeed, power is a precondition as put in the following definition: “for it depends on the ability to give or withhold social benefits, facilities, opportunities [...] from someone who should be entitled to them, and are denied on the basis of race, color or national origin” (“racial discrimination”). Theoretically, a society like the American one, which has as ambition to be equalitarian, should grant the same rights and the same privileges to all its members without distinction of any sort. This is far from reflecting the reality in the United States and every day, reports of racial discrimination are still

registered despite the fact that the *Brown vs. Board of Topeka* Supreme Court decision has legally outlawed racial discrimination since 1954. Its interdiction has made the phenomenon to mute, to change, to be less apparent and less recognizable: racial discrimination has become subtler.

People may experience discrimination in a variety of ways. Racial discrimination has more or less overt forms (Coates 241). In its most overt form, racial discrimination can occur because of stereotyping, prejudice and bias. When a discriminatory act is overt, perpetrators act openly without any attempt to disguise the real motives behind the action. In this case, there is a clear preferential treatment towards the members of the same racial group (commonly referred to as the in-group) and members of the other racial groups (out-groups) are openly disadvantaged or discarded altogether. It can also occur as seen earlier through subtler forms of differential treatment.

A close relationship exists between racial prejudice and racial discrimination. One is a prerequisite to the other. Indeed, in most cases, racial prejudice precedes discrimination. The presence of racial prejudice may or may not lead to racial discrimination. Quillian confirmed this aspect when he asserted, “In most accounts, prejudice is the principal motivating force behind discrimination. Scholars have recognized, however, that discrimination can have non-prejudicial causes” (301). In most cases, an individual’s prejudice may push him to discriminate. In rare cases, other factors motivate discrimination even when occurring in a racial context.

3. Racial Prejudice vs. Racism

Definitions of racism vary but most definitions comprise the same essential components. The central notions that are associated with this phenomenon are power

and domination, sometimes even oppression. Quillian accordingly defined it as, “a system of racial oppression of one racial group by another [...] racial beliefs and practices are those that contribute to upholding racial domination and are tied to belief in the subgroup’s inferiority” (301). Besides, the US Civil Rights Commission defines racism broadly as “any action or attitude, conscious or unconscious, that subordinates an individual or group based on skin colour or race. It can be enacted individually or institutionally” (qtd. in “race”). Professor David Goldberg proposed another definition: “Racism, however, involves the mostly insidious moral judgment of someone because she is a member, or is perceived to be a member of a certain ethnic group” (qtd. in Corlett 24). Thus, society judges an individual simply on his/her racial appurtenance. Here, the author raises an important point that highlights the absence of logic and rationality behind racism: the basis of racism lies on the perception of an individual’s race. This thesis has previously highlighted the inconstancy of racial classification. A judgment based on physical appearance and such unreliable trait as skin color is highly likely to be biased.

The *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism* provides a good recapitulation. Firstly, racism implies authority, power as stated in the encyclopedia, “Racism is a form of dominance in which one racial group enjoys control over the outcomes of another racial group. The dominant group (racial) exercises its power to the persistent disadvantage of the subordinate group” (74). Other definitions confirm the necessity of power implied in the notion of racism. For example, American sociologist Robert Blauner proposed another interesting definition of racism; he described it as a:

Principle of social domination by which a group seen as inferior or differential in allegedly biological characteristics is exploited, controlled, and oppressed socially by a superordinate group. (qtd. in

Barrera 307)

Due to the association of racism with power, some sociologists come to deny the fact that minorities can be racists. Indeed, since authority is necessary for racism, the racial minorities, who do not possess the supremacy of Whites, cannot engage in racist acts. Thus to highlight this aspect, it is judicial to distinguish racism from racial prejudice. Accordingly, Yancey asserts, "Racism as based upon institutional power instead of relying on a definition of racism as mere personal prejudice_ which can be present with the members of any racial group" (Yancey, "Blacks" 142). In fact, any person regardless of race can hold prejudice; nevertheless, not any one can be racist. Therefore, scholars often stress the impossibility for racial minorities to be racist.

In addition, racism implies as seen earlier a hierarchy of the races: "the beliefs that sustain and rationalize group dominance presume the superiority of the in-group and the inferiority of the out-group" (Mania et al. 74). Furthermore, racism exists and is expressed at different levels, personal, institutional or cultural as stated in the definitions cited above. In the *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, it is stated that, "racism is a multi-level phenomenon expressed by individuals (micro-level), is critically influenced by institutions (meso-level) and deeply embedded in the entire culture (macro-level)" (Mania et al. 74). Finally, one cannot deny the responsibility of racism in the perpetuation of racial inequality because it contributes directly or indirectly to that absence of equality between races.

Finally, racism is composed of three elements: stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination (Mania et al. 75). All three are necessary for racism to occur. Each is a prerequisite to the other, i.e.: there can be no prejudice without stereotypes and generally, there cannot be discrimination without prejudice. The existence of each

conditions the formation of the other. Corlett confirms this aspect stating that: “Racism involves ethnic prejudice plus actual or attempted discrimination” (33). Here lies the relationship between racial prejudice and racism: prejudice may lead to racism. It is an essential element for racism to occur.

IV. Social Groups Categorization:

1. Types of groups:

As any society, the American society is divided into groups more or less apparent, more or less obvious. Social groups are generally classified in terms of race, ethnicity, religion and gender. Thus, a society comprises mainly racial groups, ethnic groups, religious groups and gender groups. The belonging of a person to a given race, culture and origin, to a religion or to a sex is going to determine the individual's categorization into these social groups. Membership to one group does not exclude membership to another. The margin between these groups is sometimes very difficult to trace, just like the case of racial groups. Race is only one of the criteria for categorization. The problem with that categorization is that the different social groups are not equal in status. Indeed, some group usually dominates the others. In the USA, the white race dominates the other racial groups; the Whites with northern European ancestry prevail over the other ethnic groups. The Protestant group is the dominant religious group, and finally men prevail over women in society. This categorization is not useful simply to “organize” the society, but above all it serves the purpose of determining to whom to grant and to whom to deny opportunities and privileges. In order to understand better this unequal relationship, it would be useful to look into the notions of minority and majority.

2. Minority-Majority

2.1. Definitions and Characteristics:

After having reviewed the notion of race and its parented terms, one needs to tackle the often-used terms of minority and majority. This theoretical part would not provide an acceptably thorough analysis without the explanation of these two crucial terms. Thus, what do the often-used terms of minority and majority mean? A minority group is a group of people singled out for unequal treatment (Schaefer 7). This minority group may be a racial, a religious, an ethnic or a gender group. A minority is not in a dominant position; it is dominated. Researchers A. J. Jongman and A. P. Schmid attempted to give a thorough description of what is a minority group. It is, according to them: “a group typically numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members—being nationals of the state—possess ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics distinguishing them from the rest of the population” (257). As the definition asserts, one may refer to a given group as a minority group because of its typical numerical inferiority. This means that the minority group is often smaller in number than the majority group in varying degrees.

Nevertheless, it happens that a numerical majority finds itself in a minority, i.e.: non-dominant position, as the authors state later: “a minority group can sometimes be a numerical majority in a minority group position.” Instances of these exceptions are women that are subordinated to men despite their numerical superiority. Thus, minority group status is not a matter of numbers. Indeed, in the USA, the number of women outnumbers that of men. Likewise, Blacks though outnumbering Whites in Carolina in the past used to be in a subordinate position and were considered as a minority. The numerical aspect in the definition has high implications for the relation between the minority and majority groups. In the future, experts estimate that by the year 2050, the white majority would be in a numerical

inferiority (Ortman and Guarneri 4). Indeed, wide-scale immigration from other races and a lower natural increase among the white population leads to a greater growth of non-white populations. One may wonder what will happen in race relations when Whites will be in numerical inferiority. Will they continue to dominate or lose their supremacy?

Subsequent to this definition, it would be useful to review what are the agreed-upon characteristics of minorities. In 1954, Scholars Wagley and Harris shed light on central features characterizing a minority group; Jongman and Schmid later advanced the same characteristics. These features are, “unequal treatment; distinguishing physical and cultural traits; involuntary membership; awareness of subordination; in-group marriage” (qtd. in Schaeffer 7). First, members of a minority group suffer from unequal treatment. The majority group discriminates against the minority group, i.e.: they suffer various disadvantages at the hand of the dominant group. They have less control over their lives than the members of the dominant group do. They may experience prejudice, discrimination, segregation and even extermination and these result in social inequality. Second, the dominant group can easily identify and set apart minority groups because of distinctive physical and cultural traits that they have in common with their group. In this case, for instance, women are a group that is easily identifiable as well as Asians or Arabs. These features characterizing a minority group are visible to the rest of the population. These may be the skin color, the way of dressing or language. The problem is that this classification into minority groups is arbitrary and differs from one society to another. Third, involuntary membership characterizes minority status. This means that usually, people do not become members of a minority group voluntarily; they are born into it. This absence of choice and thus determinism is sometimes difficult to accept for minority group members. Fourth,

minority group members are aware of their unequal status; they are conscious of their subordinate position. From this sense of subordination often emerges a strong sense of solidarity and oneness. Each minority group tends to see itself as unique and seeks for group solidarity. As a result, we have the adoption of the language “us” versus “them”. Finally, minority group members tend to intermarry; i.e.: they more often than not marry within the group by choice or sometimes by necessity. The majority of sociologists agree more or less upon these features.

2.2. Types of Subordinate/Minority Groups:

Any society is composed of majority and minority groups. No society is perfectly homogeneous. The creation of social groups is possible through different processes: colonialism, annexation and above all immigration. Through these processes and others that are more or less natural, social groups emerge. Roughly, individuals are categorized into groups on the basis of their gender, race, national origin and culture, religion, disability or their sexual orientation. Firstly, minority groups may be racial groups. Individuals in society are assigned a race according to their physical traits as seen previously in this chapter. Thus, minorities are set apart on the basis of obvious physical differences. It belongs to society to determine what physical differences are attributed to which race because the latter is a social construct. In the USA, skin color is one of the bases on which to classify an individual; texture and, to some extent, color of the hair, body shape are other features. Examples of minority races in the USA are African-Americans, Native Americans, Asian-Americans ... (Humes et al. 3). For racial groups, it is the physical distinctiveness rather than the cultural differences that affect their minority status.

Secondly, minority groups may be ethnic. In this case, one takes into consideration cultural traits. Minority ethnic groups are categorized according to cultural distinctions such as the language, the customs and traditions, the way of dressing, food habits and other factors that may highlight an individual's origin. One's ethnicity is somehow subtle; it is consequently difficult to determine since it cannot sometimes be seen at first glance like the other criteria. Ethnic groups are set apart because of their national origin or distinctive cultural patterns. Examples of ethnic minorities in the United States are Hispanics, Chinese-Americans, Japanese-Americans... The two types of minorities discussed above are sometimes intertwined because in people's minds, there is confusion between race and ethnicity.

Furthermore, association with a religion other than the dominant faith is the third basis for minority group status. Generally, in any society with a minimum of religious freedom, there is the official religion: the religion practiced by the greatest number, and other faiths practiced by minorities. As far as the USA is concerned, the largest religious minority is the Catholic group. In addition, Muslims, Mormons and other religious sects are also illustrations of religious minorities. It should be stressed here that sometimes this category is included within ethnic groups since in that case, religion is considered as part of culture and thus of ethnicity. Finally, one may add to this list particular groups that bear minority status. These are the homosexuals and the handicapped, i.e.: the physically or mentally disabled. These two categories of minority groups represent a tiny proportion of the population. It is even difficult to register the exact number of homosexuals as sexual orientation is still a taboo. Nevertheless, both groups are very small minorities numerically. Nonetheless, they suffer from discrimination on the part of the dominant group.

One has to bear in mind that appurtenance to a minority group is not exclusive. This means that the same individual may combine belonging to two, three or even four minority groups. For instance, at the extreme, a woman may be Arab-American, Muslim and handicapped or a man may be homosexual, Chinese and Buddhist. It entails that the more minority groups an individual combines, the more discrimination he/she is likely to face. As a result, the struggle for equality is particularly difficult.

3. Minority-Majority Relationship:

Minority groups are subordinated in terms of power and privilege to the majority or dominant group. Dominant group members possess power, enjoy the most privileges and often belong to the highest class in society (Rollings 1). They are those that dominate and discriminate against the minorities. They share some characteristics with the minorities; for example, they possess distinctive physical and cultural traits. In addition, they tend to marry within their group; one may explain this tendency by a reluctance to marry with someone considered inferior. Finally and like the minority groups, they also feel strong group solidarity.

Several types of relations may be possible with varying degrees of tolerance. Assimilation, pluralism, segregation, exclusion and extermination are different patterns/policies describing the possibility of relation that dominant groups and minorities may develop (Eller 116-117). A brief overview may prove useful here. Two alternatives face the dominant group members: either they accept the minorities or they reject them. In the case of acceptance, we have three possible approaches. In the assimilationist one, the minority group has to assimilate, to integrate the dominant group's culture (Romero 240). It means that the members of the minority groups give up their own language, religion and ways of life and adopt those of the dominant

group. It demands conformity to the dominant group (Eller 116). Dominant groups tend to maintain the following discourse: “you should be like us” implicitly, “because we are the best”. While assimilation is a painful process and is most of the time badly experienced by the minorities, it is never total and may subsequently lead to psychological traumas associated with the search of identity. The assimilationist approach is the policy that the United States officially preaches since the formation of that nation. This policy coincides with the American ambition to stand as a model. In addition, its convenience when compared with the other approaches is also an undeniable attraction to any government.

An alternative approach is pluralism. It is a policy followed by Great Britain for instance. In a pluralist society, each group coexists with the others while keeping their own language, culture.... What is worth mentioning is the good relations between the different groups; there is mutual respect (Schaeffer 27). There is a majority group, but there is no coercion to follow the dominant group. Each group is free to maintain its identity, culture. Each group is different, and the other groups accept their mutual differences. The image of the salad bowl in which every group keeps its substance and identity like the ingredients (vegetables) of the salad embodies this case. The cucumber remains a cucumber, the tomato as well and all the ingredients form a harmonious whole, each contributing to the richness of the salad (society). Appearing idealistic, pluralist societies are very difficult to manage, and legislating among such a variety of cultures often becomes a headache.

In the previous approach, the ingredients, the social groups, do not melt to form a new substance like implied in the symbol of the melting pot, inadequately used to refer to the American nation. The notion of melting pot leads to another type of relation, which is fusion. According to this approach, social groups merge into a new

variety or type of Man. In this case, all the social groups, like the ingredients in a soup, are going to melt in a kind of giant melting pot keeping only the best of each category. Automatically, the richer and the more varied the ingredients, the more beneficial will be the soup for the health. Thus, theoretically, a society, which is composed of new men gathering the best features from each “race”, is likely to be an ideal one. In order to reach such aim, social groups have to intermarry and to reproduce with each other without any preference or artificial barriers due to categorizations. Jean de Crèvecoeur best expressed this image when he described the young American society as a huge melting pot in which the different races were to fuse; he noted, “[h]ere, individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and prosperity will cause great deal of changes in the world” (qtd. in Franklin 322). This pattern is even more idealistic than pluralism as it requires an equalitarian status and a total absence of sense of superiority on the part of the majority group. This is already very difficult to achieve; in addition, it requires a desire to mix with the other groups with all what it implies for one’s marks and identity. Societies must reach a high level of advancement and sophistication to overcome the divisions and animosity along racial, ethnic, religious, gender lines. The American nation has not reached this step yet.

The previous three approaches (assimilation, pluralism and fusion) imply a certain degree of acceptance of minority group presence on the part of the majority or dominant group. It happens, however, that the dominant group refuses the cohabitation or coexistence with some minority groups. In this case, three patterns are possible: segregation, exclusion or extermination (Eller 117). To begin with, segregation implies the total physical separation of the dominant and the minority group(s). Society designs separate facilities and commodities for each, of an inferior

quality for the minority. Segregation exists at all levels: residential, educational, and it even involves means of transportation, employment... Historically, there existed legal segregation of Blacks in the USA until 1954 when the Supreme Court officially outlawed it. Thus, segregation involves a complete separation within the same society.

Second, it happens that the dominant group does not accept at all the coexistence with the minority group; as a result, this refusal leads to the exclusion of that group from the society. The society rejects this group. In this case, minority group members live marginalized. Things may turn worse as the majority group may chase away the minority group who is then obliged to migrate to other places. For example, this happened in the United States in the past when the American decision-makers created a state in Africa, Liberia, with the purpose of sending African-Americans back to Africa.

Finally, at the extreme, the dominant group may simply attempt to eliminate physically the minority group. Although the United States has never officially adopted such a policy, unlike for instance Germany which enforced this policy and tried to exterminate some groups-Jews, guppies- individual actions were and are still numerous. Lynching, cruel mob assassinations of Blacks were routine crimes in the USA in the past. Overall, these patterns imply different degrees of tolerance; but, generally, idealistic societies in which the minorities and the dominant group live in harmony on an equal footing did not exist in the past and do not exist nowadays nor are they likely to exist in the near future.

Conclusion:

The intent of this chapter was to clarify notions that are at the essence of this dissertation. It proved to be even more necessary as the terms are subject to controversy. Central to the understanding of this work are the concepts of race and racial prejudice. Though scientifically invalidated, the classification of human beings along physical traits continues as a social construct. Racial classification is still significant in social relations. The belief into race leads to racial prejudice a pre-formed opinion about individuals based on their alleged appurtenance to a given 'race.' In understanding racial prejudice, one would realize the difficulty behind its elimination because it is an attitude and belongs to the mind. It proved to be judicial to add in this section a description of social relations involving minority and majority groups in order to understand the dynamics behind distinct status and unequal distribution of wealth and privileges. It also shows that not racial groups solely are subordinate in the American society. Once these notions clarified, it would be useful now to ponder on the American experience with racial prejudice before the coming of Barack Obama to the presidency. This will be the subject of the second chapter.

Chapter Two

American Experience with Racial Prejudice before the Coming of Barack Obama: An Overview

Introduction:

After a tentative explanation of the central notion of racial prejudice in the previous chapter, the present section will be devoted to exploring the early American experience with racial prejudice as well as its evolution. This part offers an attempt to shed some light on the existence of racial prejudice since the very beginning of American history, i.e.: since colonial times. The purpose of this chapter is to assess the importance of racial prejudice in the American society. Furthermore, it should be of interest at this stage of the research to attempt to make an overview of the state of racial prejudice before the coming of President Obama. After a short synopsis of its evolution, one will describe racial prejudice through its different aspects. To begin

with, one will provide a depiction of the classical perception of the white majority of racial minorities; followed by the often-neglected issue of racial minorities' prejudice towards the Whites themselves. Finally, one will discuss inter-minority prejudice in an attempt to make a thorough portrait of this flaw, without always focusing on white prejudice, hereby alluding that Whites only are guilty of prejudiced attitudes.

I. The Initial Relative Unimportance of Race:

1. Rarity of Colonial People's Self Identification along Racial Lines:

At the beginning of European settlement of North America, it seems that race was less significant than other human attributes in influencing relations between people. Indeed, other features were as important, if not more important, than racial distinctions. Among these are ethnicity or national origin, religion and wealth. Religion and cultural achievement were the primary points of reference to identify and judge an individual. In early colonial America, people did not categorize themselves primarily into races. Indeed, the English settlers of the seventeenth century identified themselves as English, Christians and members of a particular class, rather than primarily "White" as opposed to "Black" or "Red". Generally, as historian Robin D. G. Kelley put it:

Africans came to the New World not as Black people, not as Negroes. They did not see themselves that way. They saw themselves according to their own sort of ethnic identities. The same was true of Europeans who viewed themselves as Portuguese, or English, or Irish. ("Race: The Power of an Illusion")

It is very important to stress here that Whites did not perceive themselves as part of the same racial group, as belonging to the same race. Indeed, French, German, Swedish, Scottish settlers did not consider themselves as belonging to the same group; they did not even consider themselves collectively as Europeans; rather, they primarily identify according to their country of origin (Harvey 1). This aspect is visible when reading narratives of early settlers. They usually refer to themselves according to their origin or their religion. They seldom use the racial term of “White” to designate themselves.

The concept of one’s whiteness was still to be constructed. An Englishman or a German thought genuinely that he had little in common with, for instance, a Portuguese or an Italian. The same is valid among the rest of the early European settlers. The same is true for the Indians. Rather, people’s self-identification rested primarily on one’s ethnicity as mentioned by Kelley. Indians’ identity was rather linked to their tribal appurtenance. The same was also true for the Africans until the later emergence of states in Africa. Producer Larry Adelman made this point even more explicit:

It may be hard for us to comprehend today that the American Indians didn't see themselves as Indians. Nor did the English see themselves as white. Neither saw themselves as a race. The peoples of the Americas were divided into separate and distinct nations - hundreds of them. Amerindian nations such as the Algonquians differentiated themselves from the Iroquois or Cherokee by religion, language and customs just as Protestant, English-speaking Britain distinguished itself from Catholic, Spanish-speaking Spain. (Elderman, interview).

Thus, race was not as omnipresent in early American history as it became later. It was not a determinant factor in people's self-identification, and it did not regulate social interactions. Other criteria seem to be more significant at the onset of American history.

2. The Prevalence of Other Criteria:

National origin, religion and to some degree wealth had more impact on the way people identified themselves and interacted with each other than race (Harvey 1). These differentiations aroused prejudices and sometimes gave way to hostility. Sociologist Sergio Romero confirmed this reality: "When the British first settled on the North American Atlantic coast, race was not a social construct [...] Primary differentiation at that time was based on ethnicity, religion, and economic status" (236). Ethnicity and religion prevailed.

2.1. Importance of Ethnicity and Religion

At the onset of American history, the national origin was significant. Since the United States was a nation of immigrants, all had a country of origin. This criterion was highly important in determining social interactions. As the settlers were predominately British, these came to be regarded as the elite, the cream of colonial society. All individuals that were deviant from this ideal were to be prejudiced against, discriminated against. They sometimes confronted open hostility. At different intervals, the earlier comers had regarded later comers of different nationalities with contempt. In turn, Germans, Irish, Italians, Eastern-Europeans then Jews were denigrated. A surprising fact is the physical, religious, and cultural resemblance

between English, Irish and Germans for instance. Nevertheless, the existence of prejudice towards these nationalities proves the early significance of ethnicity. For example, Germans encountered some hostility by some settlers. Political leader Benjamin Franklin illustrates this sentiment when he remarked in 1751 in his memoirs entitled *Observations on the Increase of Mankind, On Peopling of Countries ... etc.*:

Why should the Palatine Boors [Germans] be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion. (10)

Similarly, debasing names were commonly used by English settlers to refer to Irish settlers: “low bowed”, “wild”, “bestial”, “savage”, “lazy” etc... (Mc Donald). The Irish settlers were even portrayed as ape-like. This same comparison was later used, and is still used, to describe Blacks (Kenny 365). Later, Italians and Jews were also victims of prejudice on the part of the Anglo-Saxon elite (Marger 324).

In fact, American settlers first directed their prejudice at the non-English, then the non-British, then the non-North-Western Europeans, then at the non-Europeans. The definition of whiteness adapted with the gradual integration of some groups into the “white category.” Here, intertwined with the skin color, the construction of race has emerged as a dominant feature in American society ever since.

Other criteria like religion and culture also had some significance. Being the first settlers, the British regarded their religion, Protestantism, as the norm. Early

settlers who were majoritarily protestant frequently displayed hostility towards followers of other main religions like Catholicism and Judaism. They often discriminated against the disciples of these religions; they sometimes persecuted them. They even forced them to exile or assassinated them. Even within Protestantism, there existed hostility between the different branches at the beginning. Religious prejudice did not spare disciples of different sects within Protestantism like Quakers or Methodists (Kaminsky 1). Indeed, Puritans and other dominant protestant denominations discriminated against, persecuted, chased and even executed some members of other protestant sects like Quakers and Presbyterians (Jefferson 232). Though harsh, this opposition did not relate to a strong feeling of superiority. Nevertheless, the inferiority of Blacks and Indians was initially justified on religious and cultural rather than on racial grounds. Early settlers often decried their presumed heathenism and alleged absence of culture. For instance, missionary Samuel Purchase voiced these beliefs in his depiction of Indians: “bad people, having little of Humanities but Shape, ignorant of civilities, of arts, of religion...” (qtd. in Brogan 64). These beliefs, though ill- founded since both Africans and Indians did have a variety of religions and cultures, provided a proof of their inferiority and a justification for the bad treatment they received.

2.2. Significance of Wealth:

Although much less important than in the Old World, wealth differences between the settlers determined to some extent one’s status in colonial society. One of the ambitions of the settlers was to create a model society that would be open to everyone. This society would also be equalitarian without social classes. Though there were effectively no real great discrepancies in wealth at the beginning, there was still a kind of an underclass represented by the white indentured servants. It is estimated

that about 70% of migrants from England who came between 1630 and 1660 were indentured servants (“Indentured Servants”, Okolo 104). Indentured servants were poor White people who could not pay their voyage to America. Therefore, they often offered their services a number of years to pay back the price of their transportation. Indentures were typically four to seven years in duration, but they may sometimes last as long as ten years. Nevertheless, their “employer” may prolong this contract for bad behavior or escape. At the end of this period, they were free again and were even given some land to start anew their life. This is the visible part of the iceberg since a glimpse at the treatment of the servants highlights the cruelty of English settlers against their poor fellow compatriots. Here no distinctions, neither of race nor of religion nor even of national origin can be used as a pretext to cover this ill-treatment as historian Barbara Fields and sociologist Karen Fields stated it: “Neither white skin nor English nationality protected them from the grossest forms of brutality and exploitation. The only degradation they were spared was perpetual enslavement” (122). During the time of his/her indenture, a servant was considered his master’s personal property. Here is a description of the sufferings and ill-treatment of the English indentured servants provided by the Fields:

They could be bought and sold like livestock, kidnapped, stolen, put up as stakes in card games, and awarded--even before their arrival to America—to the victors of lawsuits. Greedy magnates [...] stinted the servants’ food and cheated them out of their freedom dues, and often out of their freedom itself, when they had served their time. Servants were beaten, maimed, and even killed without impunity. (122)

From this description is evidenced the bad if not inhuman treatment that the wealthier English inflicted on their poorer compatriots. The former denied their rights to the

latter. They treated servants as mere property and stripped them of their dignity. While a servant, a person could not marry and have children; he was in need of a permission to go anywhere, to perform work for someone else or to receive money for personal use (“Indentured Servants”). Physical punishment by whipping was not exceptional. In addition, labor was strenuous in view of the relatively feeble physical constitution of the English people, and living conditions were particularly harsh (Smedley 2). At the beginning, servants usually did not live enough to receive their freedom. However astonishing this may appear, the treatment of early indentured servants resembled that of slaves, being spared only perpetual, hereditary servitude. This may stand as strong evidence that wealth discrepancies led also to oppression. They determined the status of individuals and indentured servants being at the bottom of the white social scale were as held in contempt as people of other religions, other races ... etc.

Therefore, one may deduce that race was not so important in early colonial people’s relations. Religion, national origin or wealth were more relevant in determining one’s status. Settlers at the beginning did not view themselves and other peoples as belonging to races. Rather, they categorized people according to their religion, to their country of origin or their wealth. This categorization is not equalitarian, and colonists started to place individuals along a scale with some superior to others. Whatever the basis for their classification: nationality, religion or other, early settlers were constructing the foundations of not only an unequalitarian but also an oppressive society. Historian Ira Berlin pointed out:

In early American society, people distinguish themselves by religion; they distinguish themselves by nationality; they distinguish themselves by family. And however they distinguish themselves, they arrange

themselves in a hierarchical order in which a few are on top, and many are on the bottom... (Berlin)

It is important to emphasize here that whatever traits the settlers chose to categorize people on, they categorize them on a scale with some better than the others. As a result, colonial society was far from being equalitarian contrary to the ambitions of the early colonists to build an ideal society based on equality. This may sound surprising in view of the past and present prevalence of racial considerations. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that despite the relative importance of religion, national origin and wealth as determinant factors of an individual's worth, disguised racial considerations exist since earliest times gaining prominence as time passes.

2.3. White-Black Servants: Equality of Oppression:

In order to stress further the fact that racial consciousness was relatively weak in early colonial times, one may cite a phenomenon referred to as the equality of oppression between the white servants and supposedly black servants. There is some evidence that in early colonial times, wealthy colonists treated Africans in the same manner as white servants (Bigelow 30). Some records indicate that they brought Africans as servants under indenture and that after their period of contract they freed them just like their white counterparts. Some sources even suggested that black servants could go to courts to sue for their freedom (Bigelow 30). Living conditions and treatment seem to have been alike. This means that both were oppressed in the same way: this is what is meant by the equality of oppression. Illustrating this similar treatment, Professor Audrey Smedley pointed out: "Servants were bought and sold, ill-fed, ill-clothed, and poorly-housed. They were punished cruelly for petty crimes" (2). In addition, Historian Lerone Bennett stated: "the available evidence suggests that

most of the first generation of African Americans worked out their terms of servitude and were freed [...] the colonies' power structure made little or no distinction between black and white servants who were assigned the same task and were held in equal contempt" (qtd. in Bigelow 30). Thus, white colonists put servants in the same basket; black and white servants used to endure the same intolerable fate under similar conditions. Suffering from the same lot, indentured servants often fraternized indiscriminately of their skin color or national origin (Romero 236). These realities tend to reinforce the fact that race was not such an important factor of difference between people in early America.

II. The Presence of Racial Prejudice since Earliest Times and its Subsequent Implantation:

First, the early comers to the American continent were for the overwhelming majority White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant (WASP); they arrived from the British Isles for the most part of them. In arriving to what was to become the United States of America, it is important to bear in mind that they brought with them their way of thinking, their culture, and their religion. Thus, one can say that they brought also their prejudices. Marcus Eli Ravage has highlighted this important aspect when depicting the immigrant:

The alien that come here from Europe is not the raw material that Americans supposed him to be. He is not a blank sheet to be written on as you see fit. He has not sprung out of nowhere. Quite the contrary, he brings with him a deep-rooted tradition, a system of culture and tastes and habits—a point of view which is as ancient as his national experience and which has been engendered in him by his race and his

environment. And it is this thing—this entire Old World Soul of his—that comes into conflict with America as soon as he has landed. (qtd. in Daniels 102).

The immigrants to America were not newly born men and women; each came to America with a loaded past. This reality is often overcome by a commonplace belief that when coming to the new continent, individuals are born anew; they are just like newly-born infants i.e.: they leave everything behind, which is something impossible. One can leave material possessions: his house, his car, his job but not his identity, his experiences, what makes his personality. St John de Crevecoeur best expressed this wrong assumption: “He is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones [...]” (54). Thus, since they originated from prejudiced societies where generally all that is white has a positive connotation and all that is dark a negative one, the settlers’ reactions to the peoples encountered were preconditioned.

Similarly, the English came to the new world with minds full of preconceptions about the Native people. Reports and narratives from explorers especially the Spanish and the Portuguese abounded and were available for anyone interested in crossing the Atlantic Ocean. Exaggerated or genuine, the depictions of the indigenous people of America gave way to all sorts of images and ideas about these peoples. Rather than a single preconception of the Indians, ambivalent stereotypes arose in English minds. As Historian Gary Nash pointed out, these early accounts seem to have created a “split image of the Indian in the English mind” (Nash, “Image of the Indian” 199). Negative depictions existed along less negative ones. Though these ideas are less negative, one cannot consider them as utterly positive. Therefore, numerous accounts described the Native in a negative light. On

the one hand, the native was imagined to be a “savage, hostile and beast-like creature that inhabited the animal kingdom rather than the kingdom of men” (Nash, “Image” 199). In 1585, prospective adventurers to the New World could read one description of the natives of North America, which depicted them as “naked, lascivious individuals who cohabited “like beasts without any reasonableness” (Nash, “Red, White and Black”). Another account described them as men who “spake such speech that no men could understand them, and in their demeanor like to brute beastes” (Hakluyt et al. 23). These dark conceptions of the Indians coexisted with more positive views like the one expressed by propagandist Richard Haklyut when he described the Indian as: “simple and rude in manners, and destitute of the knowledge of God or any good laws, yet of nature gentle and tractable, and most apt to receive the Christian Religion, and to subject themselves to some good government” (qtd. in Nash, “Red, White and Black”). Thus, the contradictory image of the hostile savage and the noble savage to portray the Indian denoted some ambivalence in English preconceptions of the Native. Needless to note that the image that the explorers or propagandists wanted to give of the Indians-whether positive or negative- coincided with their purpose, respectively trade then land grabbing. One thing is worth noting here is that whether noble or hostile, a savage remains a savage denoting early prejudice in English minds even before their actual encounters with these peoples. Therefore, even before coming to the new world, the colonists had some preconceptions about the indigenous peoples that were undoubtedly going to affect their response to them.

Coming afterwards as indentured servants and then as slaves, Africans also encountered prejudiced reactions. Though justifications of the Blacks’ inferiority were based on cultural or religious grounds, they soon became racially tinged. For instance,

a prominent figure in early American history, Thomas Jefferson, contended that the color of the Blacks was the aesthetic sign of their inferiority. He accordingly advanced that:

I advance it, [...] as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by the time and circumstance, are inferior to the whites in the endowment both of body and mind. (155)

One should note here that Jefferson is the man who would write later the Declaration of Independence. In that document, he proclaimed the equality of ALL men. Most significantly, common people viewed the African as an intermediate species between the beast and Man (Brogan 64).

1. The Categorization System based on Race:

Although the early inhabitants of colonial America based their self-identification on other features than race primarily, race is a feature that has been present since earliest times. Its importance went crescendo until becoming the first and foremost criterion to categorize and classify people and the most important factor influencing relations between people. The emergence of race as the basis for judging people's worth goes back to colonial days. Indeed, race has been from the beginning present in mentalities even if this was not always conscious since race as a notion gained strength a little after the beginning of settlement in what was to become the United States.

Illustrating the influence of race on the categorization system is the use of general, all-encompassing appellations for Native Americans and Africans. The white

majority has of course designed this categorization system. Here one should understand the term majority in the light of dominant group as explained in the first chapter; it does not refer to the numerical superiority of the Whites, which was not the case in early colonial days. Thus, the white settlers collectively referred to the native population as Indians. As for the Africans, they were generally called Blacks or more pejoratively Negroes or Neggars. This categorization shows the presence of early racial prejudice as it fails to take into consideration distinctions between the different Indian nations and between the various ethnic identities of people originating from a continent as vast as Africa. Indeed, the all-encompassing term "Indian" is inappropriate in view of the incredible diversity that existed between tribes. Numerous observers of Indian cultures noted this aspect as, for instance, producer Larry Adelman:

It may be hard for us to comprehend today that the American Indians didn't see themselves as Indians. Nor did the English see themselves as white. Neither saw themselves as a race. The peoples of the Americas were divided into separate and distinct nations - hundreds of them. Amerindian nations such as the Algonquians differentiated themselves from the Iroquois or Cherokee by religion, language and customs just as Protestant, English-speaking Britain distinguished itself from Catholic, Spanish-speaking Spain.

In his own view, a Cherokee perceived himself as different from a Sioux as any English would feel towards an Italian for instance. Nevertheless, the Europeans failed or feigned not to notice these distinctions. From earliest times Indians have always identified with their tribe. A Native American would never claim his Indian identity because this general name is not suitable to reflect the real complexities of his identity. As a result, if asked, he would answer that he is a Sioux, a Nez-Percé or a

Navajo but rarely that he is an Indian. It is racial prejudice to ignore that legitimate feeling on the part of the Indian. The same is true for the African peoples. Africans identified primarily on the basis of their tribal appurtenance. The Europeans tend to see the Africans as a homogeneous group of black people. They disregarded cultural and religious differences that were surely more important for Africans than their skin color or physical appearance. Thus, there is a contradiction between the European perception of Indians and Africans and these people's own self-identification (Harvey 1). This classification highlights the growing prevalence of race as an important and increasingly major criterion for classification. Illustrating this gradual construction of the race phenomenon is the following statement by public official Benjamin Franklin, one of the most prominent early settlers:

Which leads me to one Remark: That the Number of purely white people in the world is proportionally very small. All Africa is black or tawny, Asia chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the new Comers) wholly so. And in Europe, the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians and Swedes, are generally of what we call a swarthy complexion; as are the Germans also, the Saxons only excepted, who with the English, make the principal body of white people on the face of the earth. (qtd. in Daniels 109-110)

This denotes the beginning of people's categorization into races. One may note that early settlers did not regard the Europeans themselves as belonging to the same race; the early settlers, predominately British, excluded the majority of Europeans from the highly selective group of pure Whites. Franklin illustrated a widespread belief among the settlers; he and many others did not consider Europeans as white. Here, the English and the Saxons can be accepted into the category "white". The fact that even

Swedes were not counted into the white category let appear some subjectivity and a total absence of scientific founding. These are only observations, but the following terms by Franklin denote a certain racial prejudice towards non-whites:

I could wish their [the white people's] numbers were increased [...]
 Why should we in the Sight of Superior Beings, darken its [America's] people? Why increase the Sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys, of increasing the lovely White and Red? (10)

Though hardly documented, this prejudice was not the flaw of Europeans only. One may deduce that the Native people and the Africans viewed the Europeans collectively as Whites. It is highly probable that the Natives and the Africans failed similarly to see the differences between the different ethnic origins of the Europeans. They may not be able to distinguish between European nationalities, between different religions. One can say that this is out of ignorance, but when one willingly and consciously denies individual tribes their uniqueness, in this case emerges racial prejudice. The increasing importance of classification along racial lines serves the purpose of European settlers as far as the colored people were concerned. One will tackle this aspect later in this chapter.

2. Social Status Increasingly Based on Race:

Generally, a certain number of factors determine an individual status and social position. Among these are race, ethnicity, religion, occupation, age and sex. Depending on the society to which the individual belongs, a factor may be more significant than the others. Generally, the combination of these factors is going to lower or raise one's rank in society given the fact that truly equalitarian societies do

not exist. Besides, one should stress the fact that the importance of each factor is not static; it is a dynamic phenomenon with factors gaining or losing influence (Romero 236). The American society is no exception to the rule despite a devotion to equality, which is a professed founding principle of that nation. Initially, an individual's religion and national origin determined social status in colonial America. Wealth exerted also a certain influence on an individual's worth despite the fact that the intention of the first settlers was to create a society free of disparities, an equalitarian one in which there would be no social classes. Despite this commitment to build a model society where all the individuals would have the same chance in life, richness did have significance to determine one's rank. Indeed, during the early years of American history, society, as a remnant of European legacy of social classes, was initially divided along classes rather than skin color and physical appearance (Turner Main 133). Gradually, race started to gain more and more importance until becoming the main attribute to assign people a certain worth. The concept of race has been invented and has been further reinforced by the need to justify white supremacy, the enslavement of human beings and the extermination of Indians among other injustices. Soon, race started to prevail on all other factors, and society primarily and sometimes solely evaluated or judged individuals based on race so that one's race came to determine one's value. Since then, race has become a central issue in American history as noted in the *Dictionary of American History*, "in the USA racial status has been paramount transcending all other symbols of status in human relations" (Scott 7). Thus, self-identification and social position became racially-based though this aspect was not as apparent from the beginning of colonial times.

3. The Role of Slavery and Segregation in Engraving Racial Prejudice

The issue about which precedes the other: slavery or prejudice is a matter of intense debate among the scientific community. For instance, Historian Eric Williams, for example, contended that: “slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was a consequence of slavery” (7). Sociologist Barrera confirmed this view:

American slavery began long before the era of scientific racism, and by most accounts, biologically based justifications for slaves did not become widespread until the 19th century, in response to the rising tide of abolitionist sentiments. (314)

Indeed, at the beginning, the massive enslavement of Africans and the rarer enslavement of Indians were justified on the cultural or religious deficiencies of these people. Settlers used such terms as “pagans”, “savage”, “childlike”, “uncivilized” to describe them and to justify their enslavement (Barrera 314). At the same time, a powerful counterargument to this thesis is the non-enslavement of Whites; this could support the presence of racial prejudice as the basis. Later, even with the conversion of Africans to Christianity and their education, their status barely changed. Still, one cannot bring any definite answer, but one fact is certain: slavery has further strengthened and deeply engrained racial prejudice in the American mentalities. After the abolition of that institution, segregatory practices continued to entrench this prejudice. Slavery entangled Blacks in a perpetual inferior status that became justified on racial grounds. The state of slave, which was inherited from father to son, prevented the Blacks from developing. The enslavement undermined their intellectual capacities since they had not the possibility to use their intellect but just to obey (Kaspi et al. 51). This gave way to the image of the Black as stupid further reinforcing the view of his inferiority. Negative stereotypes about the Black further engrained in American mentalities. After the abolition, the denial of rights to free Blacks kept them

in an inferior position that was justified by innate biological deficiency. As a result, slavery and other discriminatory practices reinforced racial prejudice towards Blacks. Slavery, then segregation deeply engrained racial prejudice to the extent that it became a social norm.

However powerful it may have become, racial classification remains irrational. An illustration of this irrationality is the evolution of whiteness i.e.: membership to the white category. The case of the Germans and the Irish is particularly poignant and reflects this evolution. Indeed, in early American history, the British settlers did not consider them as White. Italian and Jewish settlers underwent the same fate. These settlers were undoubtedly of white complexion; still they were not described as such. Another indication of the irrationality of racial classification is the changing membership to the white category (Prewitt 7). The white category has incorporated new groups that the British settlers did not previously consider as White simply because immigrants that are even more diverse poured into the United States.

Illustrative of the increasing significance of race existence in early America is the racial categorization present in the first national census registered in 1790. Since then, censuses have always contained racial categorization as figure 1 shows:

Table 1: Evolution of Racial Categories in the U.S. Censuses, 1790–2000

Year	Category
1790	Free Whites, Other Free Persons, and Slaves
1800 and 1810	Free Whites; Other Free Persons, except Indians not taxed; and Slaves
1820	Free Whites, Slaves, Free Colored Persons, and other persons, except Indians

not taxed

- 1830 Free White Persons, Slaves, Free Colored Persons
and
1840
- 1850 White, Black, and Mulatto
- 1860 White, Black, Mulatto, and Indian
- 1870 White, Black, Mulatto, Chinese, and Indian
and
1880
- 1890 White, Black, Mulatto, Quadroon, Octoroon, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian
- 1900 White, Black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian
- 1910 White, Black, Mulatto, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Other (plus write-in)
- 1920 White, Black, Mulatto, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean,
and Other (plus write-in)
- 1930 White, Negro, Mexican, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean
(Other races, spell out in full)
- 1940 White, Negro, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean (Other
races, spell out in full)
- 1950 White, Negro, Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino (Other races, spell out)
- 1960 White, Negro, American Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Part
Hawaiian, Aleut, Eskimo
- 1970 White, Negro or Black, Indian (American), Japanese, Chinese, Filipino,
Hawaiian, Korean, Other (print race)
- 1980 White, Negro, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Indian
(American), Asian Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan, Eskimo, Aleut,
Other (specify)
- 1990 White, Black, Indian (American), Eskimo, Aleut, Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian,
Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Asian Indian, Samoan, Guamanian, Other
Asian Pacific Islander, Other race
- 2000 White; Black, African American, or Negro; American Indian or Alaska Native
(specify tribe); Asian Indian; Chinese; Filipino; Other Asian (print race);
Japanese; Korean; Vietnamese; Hawaiian; Guamanian or Chamorro; Samoan;
Other Pacific Islander (print race); Some other race (individuals who consider
themselves multiracial can choose two or more races)

SOURCES: 1790–1990 data adapted from Anderson and Fienberg (2000: Tables 3

and 4) and 2000 data from US Census Bureau (2001a).

Through this table, one may point out at the numerous contradictions and inconstancies that accompanied racial classification in the United States. First, the early division of the American society into White and non-whites is visible. Second, the Census Bureau added some categories then these disappeared in later censuses. For instance, it treated Japanese and Chinese as distinct races though they are ethnicities. The Census Bureau removed them in 2000. Similarly and astonishingly, the Bureau also considered them a separate race for some time. Overall, we have confusion between ethnicities and races. Another aspect is the changing membership of the white category. From including only pure Whites from English then British descent, it came to incorporate other European nationalities. Historian Matthew Frye Jacobson described this aspect: “In the nineteenth century, the boundary of “white” was grudgingly extended to incorporate southern and Eastern European groups as these flooded into the country in successive waves (qtd. in Barrera 314).” With time, it included also Mexicans, Latinos in general, and even Arabs at some moment. This confusion further confirms the absence of scientific rigor in categorizing individuals by race.

III. Recent Changes in Perception:

1. Circumstances:

Racial prejudice together with racial discrimination developed in American society and both became prevalent attitudes among American people. This situation lasted until the twentieth century. At that time, the attack on scientific racism, the

atrocities of the two world wars as well as most significantly the 1960s Civil Rights Movement gave a serious blow to racial prejudice. Lincoln Quillian depicted this reality: “Before the Civil Rights era, prejudice and discrimination were openly espoused and legally enforced” (299). Afterwards, there was a consensus to preach the equality of *all* human beings regardless of race or any other considerations. A series of Declarations, laws...denounced and attacked racism. As a result, racial prejudice was condemned, and government outlawed discrimination. Because of this consensual attack, racial prejudice and discrimination declined significantly at least on a visible plan. Overall, racially prejudiced beliefs and attitudes became less openly expressed (Quillian 314).

2. Positive Impact of Elimination of Legal Discrimination on Racial Prejudice:

The different movements as well as governmental action generated positive consequences on the decline of racism. Undoubtedly, racism has declined as a direct result of the general effort. Indeed, the minorities achieved a measure of equality. One cannot deny the fact that thanks to the movements and governmental action, several blows were given to racism on different grounds. It would be useful to state briefly the positive effects of that attitude against racism. The key concern is to assess if the decline of racism reflects a weakening of racial prejudice.

1.1. Decline in Discrimination:

Ceasing to be legally sanctioned, a severe blow has been given to discrimination. Before the American Congress voted the different laws eradicating discrimination, discriminatory and segregatory practices were the rule. Governments that represented the white majority supported and initiated such rules, hereby blatantly

going against its principles. Therefore, the federal government forbade discrimination legally. Theoretically, people of any sex, race and ethnic origin would be treated equally. The results of course are worth mentioning with a neat decline of discriminatory practices. Housing which was one of the most segregated sectors provides a good example as a report from the Census Bureau concluded: "The trend for Blacks or African Americans is clearest of all -- declines in segregation were observed over the 1980 to 2000 period across all dimensions of segregation we considered" (Iceland et al. 3-4). Progress is undeniable in other sectors as well.

In order to reverse past discrimination, the American institutions adopted preferential policies such as affirmative action, which consists in the assignation of quotas of minority members to accept, to enroll or admit. Thus, a minority member would be "preferred" at equal qualifications. This type of program, though highly controversial (it was sometimes referred to as reverse discrimination), had positive results since it enhanced minority status in society by opening opportunities to minority members. One refers to opportunities that the minority members would not certainly have enjoyed in the normal course of event. There had been considerable progress as one may judge by the following data. First, concerning improvements in education, African Americans tend to continue their studies: in 1968, 70 % were high school dropouts. Nowadays, the number is 20 % (US Census Bureau 148). In addition, the rate of African-Americans attending college has tripled (US Census Bureau 148). Furthermore, there had been progress in the economic field with a reduction in poverty and closer wage parity. Not only was this policy intended to open doors to minorities and perhaps to install equality, but it also sought to make the races mix and interact so that, by being in close contact, they would perhaps lessen or get thoroughly rid of any existing prejudice. The impact of this policy on the decline of

racial prejudice is mitigated as it brought more antagonism and resentment on the part of the white majority towards the other racial groups.

One factor that may illustrate that growing tolerance and changing attitude is the growing rate of interracial mixing illustrated by the increase of cross-racial friendships and unions. In fact, since the 1967 *Loving vs. Virginia* case prohibiting anti-miscegenation laws, the rate of mixed marriages has increased from 0.4 in 1960 to 1% in 1970 to 2.9 in 1990 (Krieder 1). The steady increase continued until reaching about 6% in 2000 census and 6.9% in the 2010 one (Lofquist et al. 18); 65 % of Japanese Americans marry outside their race, while the rate goes up to 75 % for American Indians. In addition, 57 % of teenagers have dated someone of a different race (Jayson). Because of the increasing number of this mixing, racial boundaries are blurring showing an apparent decline of the significance of race. In addition, people increasingly create friendships with people of different races and this kind of relations seems no longer repulsive or ill-considered by the rest of the population. Statistics show that there is a relative increase of interracial friendships. Joyner and Kao's study show that 20% of African-Americans' relations are cross-racial while 10% of Caucasians relate with people of different races (qtd. in Page-Gould). More racial mixing means that Whites tend to consider minorities on less negative traits.

1.2. Impact on Racial Prejudice:

These victories were important not only as such but also for their impact on the personality of the minorities. This progress raised their self-esteem and helped to gain the consideration of many Whites. Thus, regarding the Whites' attitude towards the minorities, one may note a greater degree of tolerance of diversity. As stated earlier, one may prove this increasing tolerance through the massive support of public

opinion. Given also the active support of government and the media, one can state without hesitation that racism and racial prejudice in America was given a serious blow. Furthermore, this period has changed the nature of the relationship between the dominant society and the oppressed racial and ethnic minorities. In fact, it has become less hostile and looser (Alvarez 162). Indeed, by the end of the 1960s, racism had started to decline in the American society particularly with the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. Nevertheless, many factors prevent one from concluding very optimistically.

IV. Despite Huge Improvements, Persistence of Discrimination as a Manifestation of Racial Prejudice:

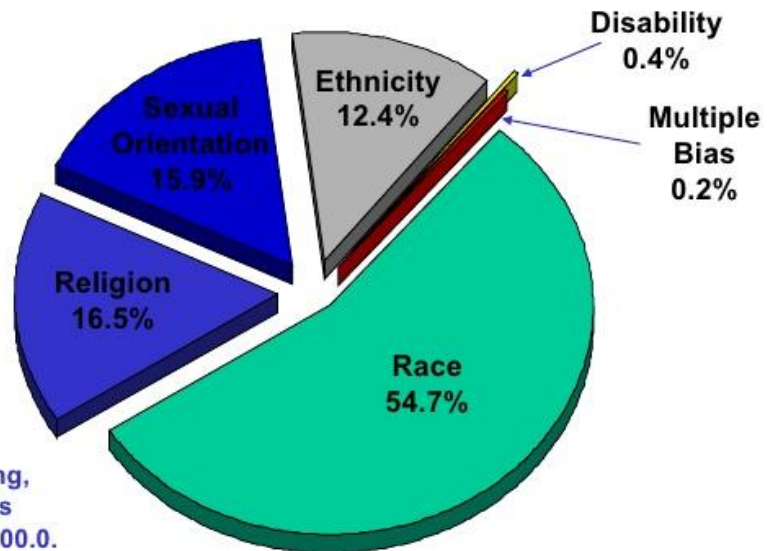
Racial prejudice being quite difficult to discern, discrimination may reflect this latent prejudice and be a proof of its existence. Thus, one may trace back the persistence of discrimination as the visible face of the iceberg; racial prejudice, being the hidden one. Although discrimination became unlawful and huge progress has been achieved, discrimination was far from being fully eradicated and the dominant white majority turned to the laws to keep the minorities in the same separate and inferior status as before their achievements. Besides, outlawed racial discrimination is still visible and pervasive, and this is true for some domains rather than others. Though public places have been desegregated, racial discrimination still exists in major fields such as in education, housing and employment. Racial discrimination continues to exist under less visible, subtler traits (Marvasti and Mc Kinney 68).

If racial discrimination persists so does racial prejudice. An American report on the implementation of the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination submitted to the United Nations in September 2000

acknowledged that racism stands as one of the most appalling challenges confronting the United States (qtd. in China's Report). Besides, a United Nations report points to "stark racial disparities" in US. institutions, including its criminal justice system (United Nations). The US is failing to meet international standards on racial equality, according to the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) based in Geneva, Switzerland. Alison Parker of Human Rights Watch noted that, "The U.N. is telling the U.S. that it needs to deal with an ugly aspect of its criminal justice system" (United Nations). This entity had been monitoring racially discriminatory practices in the United States. Thus, international investigations highlight the persistence of discrimination in the U.S. Studies are generally unanimous to conclude that varying degrees of discrimination on racial basis still exist after nearly half a century since its legal abolition. Innumerable evidence of the persistence of racial discrimination exists; here is just a panel.

Table 2: Bias-Motivated Offenses

Prejudice and Discrimination



¹Due to rounding, the percentages do not add to 100.0.

Bias-Motivated Offenses: Percent Distribution 2000

Source: U.S. Department of Justice. 2001. *Crime in the United States 2000*. Figure 2-19. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Also accessible at <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/00cius.htm>.

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Table 3 : Socioeconomic Characteristics by Racial Groups

Socioeconomic Characteristics by Racial Groups										
Numbers are in percentages, except for income. Click on a column heading to sort up or down										
	Less Than High School	College Degree	Advanced Degree	High Skill Occupation	Married, Spouse Present	Homeowner	Median Personal Income	Median Family Income	Living in Poverty	Public Assistance
Whites	15.3	25.5	9.0	21.4	64.5	76.2	\$23,640	\$48,500	9.4	1.3
Blacks	29.1	13.6	1.2	12.3	38.0	54.4	\$16,300	\$33,300	24.9	4.5
Latinos/Hispanics	48.5	9.9	1.6	9.6	56.3	52.4	\$14,400	\$36,000	21.4	3.5
Native American Indians	27.4	10.8	0.9	11.9	50.2	64.2	\$14,500	\$32,240	25.1	6.1
Asian Americans	19.5	42.9	6.5	34.0	74.9	88.2	\$20,200	\$59,000	11.5	2.2

Close Here

Source: <http://www.asian-nation.org/model-minority.shtml>

As shown in Table 2, on the totality of bias-motivated offenses, race represents the most frequent motive with 54%. In other words, more than half of the offenses are motivated by race. Religion, sexual orientation and ethnicity lag behind with much lower shares. This illustrates the continuing importance of race as a factor for committing offenses. Equally suggestive are the socioeconomic disparities that exist between racial groups visible in Table 3. A gap still exists between Whites on the one hand and the racial minorities on the other hand. Blacks, Latinos and American Indians lag behind in terms of educational attainment, median income and poverty rates notably. This sheds light on the persistence of racial discrimination.

1. In Employment :

Illustrating this reality, a study conducted in 2003 by researchers of the University of Chicago tends to highlight the persistence of racial discrimination in employment notably. The University of Chicago and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) released a study involving 5,000 fake names of candidates to job offers. It found that 10% of those featuring Caucasian-sounding names were called back compared to just 6.7% of those featuring Black-sounding names (Leonard). Moreover, resumes featuring names like “Tamika” or “Aisha” were called back just 5% and 2% of the time highlighting the double discrimination that minority women suffer from (Leonard). Indeed, the white majority does not only discriminate against them as minority members but also as women. A double obstacle of racial and gender prejudice hampers their progress. In addition, it is important to note here that the skill level of the fake black candidates made no impact on callback rate. This study tends to show that not only discrimination still exists to some degree but also that it

underlies a persisting racial prejudice because here it is more the origin of the name that determines to a certain extent one's hiring rather than one's qualifications as this would be the case in a post-racial society.

Moreover, racial discrimination is also latent in the highest sphere of professional status. At the top of the ladder, discrimination continues to hamper minority progress especially as far as potent posts are concerned. A report issued by the Glass Ceiling Commission of Department of Labor in 1995 shed light on this type of discrimination. The report revealed that women and minorities were extremely under-represented in senior management posts (*Encyclopedia of American Historical Docs* 1766). According to the report, the so-called glass-ceiling and other discriminatory barriers that stymied the careers of some minorities were still firmly in place despite three decades of affirmative action efforts to eradicate them (Glass Ceiling Report 1766).

2. In the Judicial System:

In addition to employment, the judicial system is still organized along racial lines. In this sector, discrimination is still widespread, and racial equality is a remote mirage. As far as justice is concerned, courts still obviously discriminate against minorities especially Blacks and increasingly Latinos and Arab-Americans. Racial discrimination is palpable in the courts and emerged as a very serious problem, the courts being normally the defenders of the nation's ideals of equality and fairness. First, one may notice this through the underrepresentation of minorities in the highest justice posts. In fact, 98 % of the judges in the United States are white in outstanding disproportion to their actual numbers in the total population while most of the people

receiving prison terms or death sentence are Blacks or other minorities (China's Report 6). Concerning the incarcerated population, while twelve percent of the US population is African American; nearly half of the two million prison inmates in the United States are black, and another 16 percent are Latin American (China's Report 6). Black men are eight times more likely to be in prison than white men are, with an incarceration rate of 3,408 per 100,000 black males compared to the rate of 417 per 100,000 white males (China's Report 6). In 11 states, the incarceration rate of African American men is from 12- 26 times greater than that of white men. Between 1977 and 1998, African Americans comprised 10 to 12 percent of the total US population. However, out of the 5,709 people sentenced to death, 41 percent were black. The US Department of Justice estimated that 9.4 percent of all black men at the age of 25-29 years were in prison in 1999, compared to one percent of white men in the same age group (China's Report 6). Besides, the prisons and death rows are filled with people of color in gross disproportion to their actual numbers in the population. The following figures are eloquent by themselves: A colored person convicted of murder is 12 times more likely to be sentenced to death, if the victim was white than if he/she was black (La Marche). These numbers are eloquent by themselves and shed light on the gross disparity in the treatment of minorities within the American judicial system, which is far from embodying fairness.

In addition, racial profiling is a heated issue. Indeed, police forces tend to arrest or question people influenced by the prevailing stereotypes of these racial groups. In this respect, individuals from minority groups are more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts just because of their racial appurtenance. Blacks are well-known victims of police prejudice through racial profiling. Another worthy example is Arab-Americans whom the police sources regularly and disproportionately

question and arrest after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (ACLU report 4). They are for instance more likely to have the police check their identity or frisk them in airports. One may base this attitude on the fallacious prejudice that all Arabs are terrorists as the well-known other stereotype of all blacks are criminals. This proves the persistence of racial prejudice in the representative of American authority, which is the police.

3. In Housing:

Likewise, another important field where discrimination is widespread is housing despite the existence of laws against such discrimination. Actually, in this field, owners of habitations continue to choose their tenants. Segregation exists even without such deliberate and obvious acts. Indeed, residential places are too expensive for the minorities who had to live in destitute places deserted by Whites. This phenomenon gave birth to ghettos: places of indescribable misery and poverty and havens of violence where minorities have to survive in complete ignorance of governmental authority. Residence in most American cities is still organized along racial lines. Indeed, Whites tend to occupy the suburbs while the minorities live in the decaying city centers or in ghettos (Bonilla Silva and Dietrich 48). A report released by the Census Bureau showed this aspect:

The trend for Blacks or African Americans is clearest of all -- declines in segregation were observed over the 1980 to 2000 period across all dimensions of segregation we considered. Despite these declines, residential segregation was still higher for African Americans than for the other groups across all measures. Hispanics or Latinos were generally the next most highly segregated, followed by Asians and

Pacific Islanders, and then American Indians and Alaska Natives, across a majority of the measures. Asians and Pacific Islanders, as well as Hispanics, tended to experience increases in segregation, though not across all dimensions. Increases were generally larger for Asians and Pacific Islanders than for Hispanics. (qtd. in Iceland et al. 3-4)

Corroborating that aspect, *The Washington Post* reported on 3 February 2000, that even in large U. S. cities, few residential areas are actually racially integrated (China's Report 6). Thus, the white and the minority populations scarcely come into contact; districts like Harlem, Bronx in New York for instance or Chinatown in Los Angeles are like little cities, and it is quite rare when their inhabitants gets out of their district. If racial groups do scarcely come into contact and relate with one another, then it is not possible for any of these groups to eliminate prejudice through knowing better one another. Racial stereotypes still linger in such climate.

4. In Education:

Other important field where discrimination is omnipresent is education. Schools are still de facto largely segregated. This is due to residential segregation that makes children go to school in their respective neighborhood. Thus, schools are not truly racially mixed, and disparities in the quality of the education provided as well as commodities are still observable. Worse than that, researchers have discovered that minority and white pupils may attend the same school and not receive the same quality of education. Though segregation has been outlawed, along with its differential staffing and funding, many schools continue to use "subtle mechanics to

keep Blacks' schooling" inferior to Whites' schooling, as it was proved by John U. Ogbu:

Some findings of my own research in Stockton, California, show how minorities and Whites may attend the same schools but may not necessarily receive the same education or learn similar rules of behaviour for achievement. (23)

Besides, *The Christian Science Monitor* report of May 2000 also indicated that 41 percent of white youths could receive higher education while the rate for young Latin Americans was only 22 percent (China's Report 6). Minority members find it very hard for multiple causes that array from poverty, instable familial environment and violence to concentrate on and to pursue their studies to the highest spheres.

5. In Health Care:

Minorities and the white population are not equal even in face of health. Numerous sources document this aspect. Minorities tend to lead a shorter, less healthy life than white Americans. "Minorities lag behind whites in the United States on nearly every health measure, from life expectancy and disease rates to health insurance and access to care" said a report from the Commonwealth Fund documenting the widespread disparities between racial groups (Calman). In addition, in 84% of the cases, Whites are likely to receive appropriate care: in 14% of the cases, there is no difference in care and in only 2% of the cases, minorities are to receive appropriate care, an investigation shows (Calman). To illustrate that disparity, transplantation lists are not exempt of discrimination. A modern day example of the abominable and often governmentally sanctioned health care that African Americans receive is racial discrimination in the allocation of transplantable kidneys. Despite

having a greater incidence of kidney failure than European Americans, African Americans are less likely to be the recipients of transplantable kidneys and spend considerably longer periods on kidney allocation waiting lists than European Americans (Fauci 35). Here, the responsible take into consideration the race of the patient to the detriment of more relevant factors such as the degree of illness and thus sufferance as well as the age of the patient.

The examples of racial discrimination cited in the previous section, chosen among many, illustrate the white resistance that deliberately denies to minorities whatever protection they legally and duly gained. This shows the persistence of racial prejudice through discrimination in spite of the existing legislation forbidding it. The dominant majority still deliberately gets round existing laws whose intent is redressing existing racial inequalities. Racial segregation and discrimination have been so widespread for so long a time that it is unrealistic to expect them to be eradicated in a matter of few decades. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, i.e.: half a century after the outburst of protest movements, progress is even slowing down its pace. Racial prejudice and discrimination are less visible but still omnipresent. Moreover, this overview of racial prejudice before the coming of Barack Obama to the presidency would not be complete without describing two unusually discussed facets of prejudice: that are anti-white bias and inter-minority prejudice.

IV. Neglecting Racial Prejudice towards the White Majority:

Next, it would be of interest to tackle a generally most neglected aspect of the issue: racial prejudice towards the white majority. This is an unusual aspect of the

question as most often is treated racial prejudice from Whites towards the minorities, inferring that this is the only form of prejudice existing or worth studying.

1. The Inappropriateness of the Term “Reverse Racism”:

Sociologists and other observers often use the term reverse racism to refer to racism against the white section of the population. This term seems to be inadequate. This does not mean that the phenomenon does not exist; the problem lies in the use of the word “racism”; it is misleading. Indeed, sociologists generally contend that racism implies the presence of power. Racism equates racial prejudice plus power (Yancey 140). Power implies the use of more or less coercive means to discriminate against other less powerful groups in order to maintain their characteristics and privileges (Yancey 140). Since undeniably power is in the hands of the white section of the population, one cannot claim that the minorities practice racism towards the white majority as they lack the power to do so. Then little damage can be done as Tim Wise, an anti-racist essayist, activist and lecturer, pointed out:

When a group of people has little or no power over you institutionally, they don't get to define the terms of your existence, they can't limit your opportunities, and you needn't worry much about the use of a slur to describe you and yours, since, in all likelihood, the slur is as far as it's going to go. What are they going to do next: deny you a bank loan? (Wise, Look)

Even if minorities have achieved huge progress since they start to enjoy some power, yet real power is still in the hands of the white majority. Given this reality, minorities cannot at this stage practice racism against the majority as Tim Wise stated that minorities lack the institutional influence to oppress Whites (Look). As one

component of racism is missing, one cannot refer to the phenomenon as such. The terms “anti-white racial prejudice” or “anti-white bias” seem more appropriate.

Even when one makes the contention that discrimination against Whites does exist, he/she has to ponder on the motive of the discrimination. Is racial prejudice at the origin of the discriminatory act or is it some other motive? Several court cases tend to show that reverse discrimination is a reality. Nevertheless, what generally motivate institutions into discriminating against Whites? Here, it is important to note that, in overwhelming cases, Whites face discrimination at the hands of their counterparts since the latter still control most institutions. One cannot logically hold prejudice towards the members of his own race; therefore, Whites do not experience racism most of the time. The white majority cannot perpetrate discrimination on other Whites. Rather, they give preferences to minorities to mend for or alleviate past wrongs done to minorities as Stanley Fish, a legal scholar, deduced. He was himself a “victim” of reverse discrimination when he was ruled out from an administrative position at a university. He did not feel victimized:

Although I was disappointed, I did not conclude that the situation was “unfair,” because the policy was obviously ...not intended to disenfranchise white males. Rather, the policy was driven by other considerations ... Given that the institution in question has a high percentage of minority students, a very low percentage of minority faculty, and even a lower percentage of minority administrators, it made perfect sense to focus on women and minority candidates, and within that sense, not as the result of prejudice, my whiteness and maleness became disqualifications. (qtd. in Tatum 126)

Fish's point of view is rarely shared by Whites who like to feel victimized even if the wrongs done to them is a drop in an ocean when compared to the damage inflicted on the minorities. Indeed, people in general, not only Whites, lack objectivity and react disproportionately emotively when coming to racial matters.

2. Anti-White Bias: a Rarity among Minorities?

Undoubtedly, though not quite widespread, one should not neglect this phenomenon. As this phenomenon is poorly documented, it is very difficult to assess its extent. Nevertheless, some statistics exist on the topic to corroborate or confirm its existence. According to a study reported by the channel Cable News Network, half the Blacks claimed that they had been victims of racial discrimination (CNN/ ORC Poll). What is surprising is that a quarter of Whites claimed to have been discriminated against as well (CNN/ ORC Poll). Illustrating this is the case *Hopwood vs. State of Texas* (1996): four white students having been denied admission to the University of Texas Law School as preference was given to minority members, appealed to justice. The Court decided that the University could not use race as a means of determining who to admit to their school: The Court summed up the situation as follows:

With the best of intentions, in order to increase the enrollment of certain favored classes of minority students, the University of Texas School of Law discriminates in favor of those applicants by giving substantial racial preferences in its admission program. The beneficiaries of this system are blacks and Mexican-Americans, to the detriment of whites and non-preferred minorities.

It ruled in favor of the white students:

We hold that it does not. The Law School has presented no compelling justification, under the 14th Amendment or Supreme Court precedent that allowed it to continue to elevate some races over others, even for the wholesome purpose of correcting perceived racial imbalance in the student body.

This exemplifies the relatively surprising reality of Whites having the impression of being discriminated against even if in this case it is not forcibly by minorities but by their white counterparts.

Besides, when assessing American public opinion on the subject of anti-white racial prejudice, the result is not as clear-cut as one may expect. In a Gallup poll reported by the newspaper *USA Today* in July 2008, it is found that Americans reject the notion of anti-white racism but not overwhelmingly. While a majority (55%) thinks that this racism is not widespread, a non-negligible 41% think it is (Jones). Disparities exist among the races as far as this issue is concerned: to the question: do you think racism against Whites is or is not widespread in the US? 42% of non-Hispanic Whites, 36% of Blacks and 36% of Hispanics answered by the affirmative while 55% of non-Hispanic Whites, 62% of Blacks and 60% of Hispanics responded by the negative (Jones). Here, the discrepancy between Whites, on the one hand, and the other races, on the other, highlights the lack of objectivity towards a phenomenon that is very difficult to discern. These represent contrastive perceptions of the same reality. It is important to note here that even a majority of Whites answered by the negative thereby implying the relative scarcity of the phenomenon.

3. Mixed Feelings towards the White Majority:

In a society that had a history of white privilege where people are taught to believe in the superiority of Whites over the rest of the racial minorities, the latter themselves come to share this belief. They had adopted consciously or unconsciously the stereotypes that the society endorses through parental and school education and media. Thus, some minorities endorsing common stereotypes about Whites come to see them in a positive light, but this remains an increasingly infrequent attitude. As far as the sentiments of the minorities towards Whites are concerned, it would be more accurate to say that distrust is a common feeling. Indeed, minorities, especially African-Americans and Indians, have in view their tragic past at the hands of their oppressors, the Whites; they have come to distrust if not to hate the representatives of the race that had brought so much sufferings to their ancestors. In most cases, minorities are not really prejudiced towards the white majority, they rather experience a variety of feelings that may range from resentment, jealousy, envy, distrust, dislike even hatred but may as well share positive feelings towards them like admiration even love. Thus what may be interpreted as racial prejudice is sometimes some other sentiments that the minorities display more or less openly towards the white population.

V. Ignoring the Existence of Inter-Minority Racial Prejudice:

Prejudice is not the attribute of white people exclusively. Anti-white bias is also a reality as seen in the previous section. In addition, relations between the different racial minorities are far from being harmonious and minority members happen to hold prejudice towards members of other minority races. This reality is all the more significant as they accuse the white population of a defect that they also

share. Here again as this aspect is poorly documented, it is difficult to assess its extent.

1. Inter-Minority Stereotyping: a Widespread Phenomenon:

In the Gallup poll reported by *USA Today* in July 2008, researchers denoted that minorities hold stereotypes and prejudice towards other minorities. Indeed, 51% of Blacks said that Hispanics were taking jobs and political power from Blacks. Nonetheless, 45% disagreed (Jones). On the other hand, 44% of Hispanics said that they feared Blacks identifying them with high crime rates. Half disagreed. Some may say that these results are positive because the groups' perceptions of one another are not all negative. Nevertheless, these proportions are not negligible and denote a strong presence of prejudice between the minorities themselves. The positive note is that according to the article, large majorities of Hispanics and Asians credited the Afro-Americans and the civil Rights Movements for making their life easier (Jones). In fact, what is worth noticing here is that the minorities hold the same stereotypes towards one another as Whites themselves. It is all the more significant that they condemn Whites, "their oppressors", for holding such stereotypes.

Furthermore, another study shows interminority bias. The findings of a national poll commissioned by the National Conference of Christians and Jews suggest the existence of strong stereotyping among minorities. Indeed, 46% of Hispanics and 42% of Blacks saw Asian-Americans as "unscrupulous, crafty and devious in business." On the other hand, 68% of Asians and 49% of Blacks agreed that Hispanics "tend to have bigger families that they are able to support." Finally, 31% of Asians and 28% of Latinos believed that Blacks "want to live on welfare" (qtd. in Perlmutter 203). It is worth noticing here that these stereotypes are those

vehicled through education and media, and these are the ones shared by the white majority. Thus, minorities do not develop stereotypes of their own but adopt those created and vehicled by Whites.

In addition, the experience of Christal Philips' mother, a Chinese-American, is also relevant to the present issue. Abandoned by her black companion, she was left alone to raise their child and was obliged to perform cleaning jobs. She was the victim of racist or prejudiced attitudes not only on the part of her white co-workers but also on the part of her minority mostly black colleagues (Philips). She was also down-looked at and sometimes insulted by Asians for having a mixed child with a Black. This experience is far from being an isolated case and testimonies corroborating inter-minority prejudice are widespread.

2. Racial Tension and Distrust among Minorities:

Proofs of tension between the different racial minorities are widespread. Thus, it may sound surprising that instead of uniting against a common foe, the white race, the minorities are divided. Race relations between the minorities are indeed far from being depicted as consensual. Prejudice and sometimes hatred characterize attitudes and interaction between the diverse minorities. In an article entitled "Distrust and Racial Tension High among US Non-Whites" published in *The New York Times*, it is showed that distrust and racial tension are pressing concerns for the main American minorities, i.e.: Blacks, Hispanics and Asians (Preston). For 93% of Hispanics, 92% of Blacks and 73% of the Asians, racial tensions are a very important problem in the United States. Illustrating these tensions are frequent clashes between members of different communities. Without falling into the trap of conveying the stereotype of Blacks as violent, one should nevertheless state that in most inter-minority clashes,

Blacks were involved. The most vivid antagonism is probably between the Afro-Americans and Latinos in general, Mexican-Americans in particular. Numerous instances of physical confrontations between these two groups exist. For example, several significant riots took place in Californian prisons where Mexican and Black prisoners have targeted each other for purely racial motives (Pomfret). In addition, reports exist of physical attack of Mexicans by Blacks or vice-versa as testifies Lee Baca who has been sheriff of LA County since 1998 in an editorial to the *LA Times* (Baca). Further examples are the 1992 Los Angeles riots and the Crown Heights riot (Hughey 379). The racial tension that undoubtedly exists between the two communities is a long-running one and is not likely to wane because of the soaring increase of the Latino population.

Besides, relations between Blacks and Jews are deteriorating. Indeed, Black anti-Semitism and Jewish anti-black racial prejudice are a reality of American race relations. Since the late 1960s, relations have been degrading. This antagonism stems from the fact that both communities have endorsed dominant stereotypes conveyed by the white majority. In an essay entitled "On Jewish-Black Relations", Cornell West stresses this aspect: "the religious bigotry feeds on stereotypes of Jews as villainous transgressors of the sacred; the social bigotry, on alleged Jewish conspiratorial schemes for power and control" (West 72). The Jewish political stances, particularly their opposition to governmental spending on welfare and their condemnation of affirmative action, further blacken their relation to Blacks, on the one hand, and isolated aggressions perpetuated by the Blacks against the Jews, on the other, further feed prejudice (73-74). Though Blacks tend to have prejudiced attitudes towards Jews, it is more a kind of envy than genuine hatred as the author pointed it: "Black anti-Semitism is a form of underdog resentment directed at another underdog who has

made it in American society.” The author further contended that Jewish-Americans adopted anti-Black stereotypes to enjoy the same privileges reserved for the white population only (77). Whatever the motives of one part or the other may be, prejudiced attitudes between the two are undeniably getting on very harsh tones.

Another form of inter-minority racial prejudice is the everlasting enmity between Arab and Jewish-Americans. This is a very deep and latent form of inter-minority antagonism, which is not likely to disappear one day. These communities’ tensions come from historical hatred between these groups. The Arab-Israeli conflicts in the Middle East further fuelled or reinforced this sentiment. These torrid relations are projected by both communities in the United States; each group naturally identifying with their national origins.

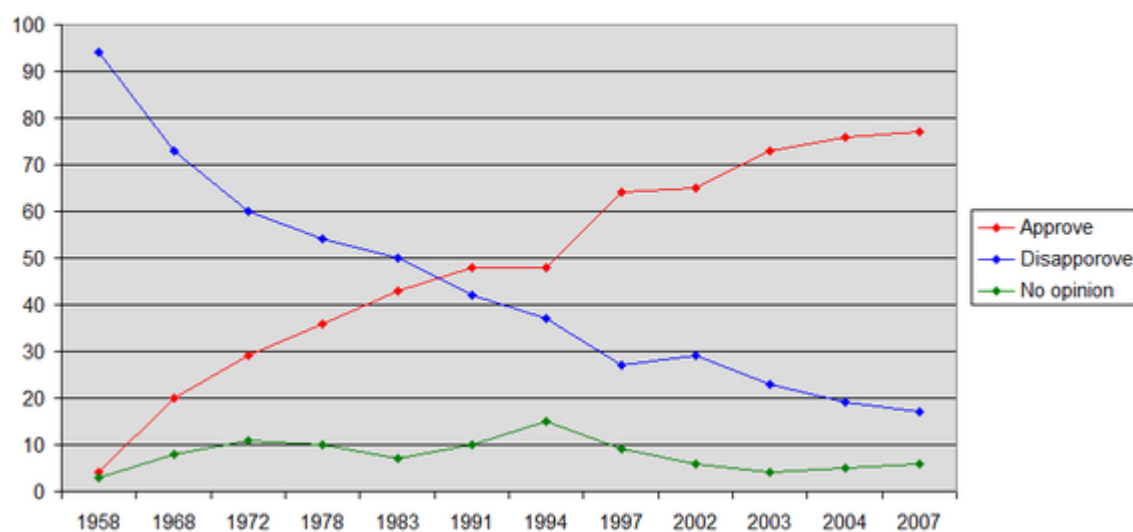
3. Blurring Interracial Boundaries: Steady Increase in Mixed Marriages:

Since the invalidation of anti-miscegenation laws in *Loving vs. Virginia* (1969), there has been a steady increase of interracial unions, highlighting the decreasing importance of race and the increasing tolerance among races. Despite the fact that the rate is still very low when compared with intra-racial unions, this promises to attain a considerable number in fifty or more years with all the possible implications of such a trend for the future of race relations. Along the slow increase in interracial marriage, one may note less disapproval and an increasing acceptance of such unions. Table 4 shows that the disapproval of Americans towards such unions was stronger than the approval until the mid-1980s. In less than half a century, the tendency was totally reversed. In 1958, almost 95% of people disapproved interracial unions whereas less than 5% approved. In 2007, almost 80% approved while *only* around 18% disapproved. One may notice that the change is spectacular in such a

relatively short period. The greater acceptance of such unions is a positive factor in the struggle against racial prejudice.

Table 4: Historical Public Opinion Approval/Disapproval of Interracial Marriage in the United States, 2007

Historical public opinion of approval/disapproval of interracial marriage in the United States
source: Gallup, Inc., 2007



Source: Gallup, Inc., 2007.

Furthermore, the increase in interracial unions will lead to the birth of still more and more mixed race offspring. This will blur the frontiers between the different races as it will be more and more difficult to assign a race to these children.

Illustrating the present fate of such children, the testimony of Christal Philipps, the half Black/half Chinese American, is poignant in showing that an increasing number of mixed unions does not necessarily rhyme with decline of racial prejudice. She wrote in an article entitled “A Time to Address Inter-Ethnic Racism” that:

I was reminded on a daily basis that I was different. The stares I would get from Blacks, Whites and Asians taught me at a young age that

being mixed was somehow wrong in a society that is still to a large extent segregated. (Phillips).

The children issued from interracial unions seem to suffer even more than minority members do because in fact both their communities rejected them: that of their father and that of their mother. Phillips further highlights this aspect when she revealed, “my mother taught me that I was a bi-racial because neither my Black nor my Asian heritage would fully accept me” (Phillips). Thus, the fact that mixed persons are generally scorned and/or marginalized shows that racial prejudice is far from being eradicated and that the rising figures of interracial relations do not demonstrate a genuine acceptance of such unions..

4. Change in Dynamics: New Stakes over Future of Inter-Minority Relations:

The composition of the United States is undergoing tremendous changes that may have an impact on future race relations. In fact, the proportion that each group holds in the overall US population is changing. Some groups are soaring, others are stagnating and still others are even declining. In an article entitled “39 Million make of Hispanics Largest US Minority Group”, the author reveals that Hispanics surpassed Blacks as the largest minority group in the United States (El Nasser). The data gathered by the Census Bureau confirmed this: In 2010, Hispanics represented 16.3% of the total population (Ennis et al. 3). The previous largest minority, the African-Americans formed solely 12.6% of the total population at the same date (Humes et al. 4). This increase is due to large-scale immigration-both legal and clandestine- in addition to higher birth rates among Americans of Hispanic origin (El Nasser). This is a landmark fact since it may change many aspects in the American society especially

that up to now Black-White racial dynamics has dominated the history of the United States. The explosion of the Hispanic population is not without having consequences on race relations with resentment from Whites of course but it also raised tensions and led to clashes between Blacks and Hispanics on the one hand and Asians and Hispanics on the other hand. The ancient minority groups like Blacks and Indians resent the fact that Hispanics are newcomers in the American society and yet, they are taking from them jobs, power. Thus, at the center of interracial disputes are jobs, political power, education and disparate cultural backgrounds and lifestyles.

Besides, Asian-Americans are the other rapidly increasing minority implying a tremendous turn in American racial composition. Asian-Americans are often depicted as a model minority. This is to have consequences on the state of race relations. First, grouping all Asian-Americans together and considering them as a single minority is denying highly contrastive origins, physical appearance and religious and cultural backgrounds. However, above all, it put in the same basket really successful Asian ethnic groups such as Japanese Americans and Chinese-Americans, and less successful ones like Pakistanis-Americans and Malaysians. This generalization undermines the latter groups' chance of advancing. Furthermore, this classification, whatever accurate it is, may create envy and resentment not only from the rest of the minorities that are not performing as well but also from a majority of Whites as Asian-Americans are doing better than they are. This may raise useless additional tensions between the different racial groups.

Conclusion:

Racial prejudice has existed since early American history. Indeed, one could trace back prejudiced attitudes to colonial times. Since then, racial prejudice has deeply entrenched in the American society becoming an unavoidable facet of the American experience. Relatively lately, Americans took conscience of the wrongs of racism and tried to alleviate this flaw. These attempts took the form of the abolition of slavery, the banning of racial discrimination and the introduction of reverse discrimination. The extent of the success of the battle against racism is a matter of debate. Though there had been a huge progress in race relations starting from the beginning of the 20th century and accelerating during the civil rights era, racial prejudice proves to be still largely present. Racial prejudice being difficult to discern and racism and racial discrimination being the visible manifestations of racial prejudice, an assessment of the former may give us a hint about the existence of the latter. Being less overt and less conscious, racial prejudice became almost invisible letting public opinion to think massively that the United States entered a post-racial era where race no longer matters. When analyzing the state of race relations more closely, this is far from being the case. Besides, this chapter highlighted three dynamics of the topic: Racial prejudice of the white majority towards the minorities, anti-white bias and inter-minority prejudice. In this way, a thorough picture of the phenomenon is provided with its existing aspects without neglecting the rarely dealt-with anti-white and inter-minority prejudice. Indeed, racial prejudice towards the white majority and inter-minority bias are even increasing as race relations deteriorate rather than really improve.

Chapter Three:

Assessment of Obama's Potential for Decreasing Racial Prejudice

Introduction:

Racial prejudice takes its roots in colonial times, and it deeply engrained in the American mentalities throughout time. Despite a certain decline due to the consensual attack on racism of the mid-twentieth century, racial prejudice persists in the American society. Thus, before the coming of Barack Obama to the presidency as the first African-American president, racial prejudice still existed in the United States. In this chapter, one will attempt at assessing president Obama's potential as the first president of a non-white race to affect this problem. In other words, one will try to ponder if one can consider Obama's race as a springboard that can facilitate and improve race relations. In order to show that, one will first examine Obama's exceptional background. Indeed, in regards to his mixed identity and his frequent residential moves, Obama's particularity places him on a strengthened position to tackle the issue of race with sincerity, experience and wisdom. Nevertheless, being the first black president is a two-edged sword as this is going to be seen in this chapter. Next, it would be judicial to ponder on his personal principles as well as on his experience with race to assess his capacity for improving race relations and

decreasing racial prejudice. Finally, one will move to measure the extent of identification of the American electorate with Obama to see if the latter truly managed to blur the racial cleavages.

I. Eclectic Identity, Personality and Background:

1. Barack Obama's Identity and Lineage: Source of Multiple

Interrogations:

1.1. Obama's Identity:

Barack Obama's identity has been the target of multiple interrogations and many wrong speculations. During his first presidential campaign, some people accused him of being too black to be president; others reproached him of not being black enough and still others of not being American enough. The truth is else. His full name is Barack Hussein Obama, Jr. originating from the Arabic language, "Barack" means "blessed by God" (Von Zumbusch 3). He was named after his father and grandfather. This may stand as the parents' acknowledgement of the child's African heritage. Of American nationality, he was born on 4 August 4, 1961 in Honolulu, Hawaii (Von Zumbusch 9). He is the product of an interracial union: his father, Barack Obama, Sr. is a Kenyan and his mother Ann Stanley Dunham is a white American born in Kansas. Thus, and this is where Obama's particularity starts, he is a mixed race individual issued from a union between a black African man and a white American woman. One has to bear in mind that this type of unions was a rarity at the time of Obama's birth. He himself describes the skin color of his parents and his reaction to it: "That my father looked nothing like the people around me- that he was black as pitch, my mother white as milk- barely registered in my mind." (*Dreams*,

Preface). As such, Barack Obama symbolizes both the old immigration from Europe (from his mother's side) and the new immigration from outside Europe (from his father's side) (Pedersen 3). In this respect, he shared the experiences of many Americans of the same background. In addition, a large array of the Americans both issued from the old and the new immigration could possibly identify with him. His exceptional mixed identity is an unquestionable asset in the struggle against racial prejudice.

1.2. An Eclectic Lineage:

Obama's eclectic lineage is another asset in the struggle against racial prejudice as it grants him a unique perspective on race. Indeed, looking more closely, Barack Obama is issued from an even more eclectic lineage. He is a mixture of Kenyan, Irish and Indian bloods (Smolenyak 46; Pedersen 3). His father belonged to one of the largest Kenyan tribes: the Luo. Barack Obama's paternal grandparents were Hussein Onyango Obama and Akumu. His mother, Stanley Ann Dunham came from the heartland of America, Kansas. Obama's maternal grandparents, Stanley and Madelyn Dunham, had a mainly British ancestry notably Irish. According to Megan Smolenyak, a genealogist writing in *Ancestry Magazine*:

His third great grandfather on his mother's side, Fulmoth Kearney, is Obama's most recent connection with the "Old Country." When Fulmoth arrived in New York in 1830, all of Obama's other maternal ancestors were already here. (46)

In addition, Madelyn Dunham, his grandmother, had Cherokee blood (Price 7). What is also of particular interest is that the maternal grandparents had slave-owning ancestors. In addition, Records show that Obama was distantly related to Jefferson

Davis, the president of the Confederacy (Wagner 13). Thus, contrary to what some writers such as Carl Pedersen claim about Obama's background as not being that exceptional citing census figures revealing a distinct rise in the number of Americans of mixed race, Obama's lineage is undoubtedly of a certain rarity (3).

2. An Atypical Social Background for a Politician:

Furthermore, Obama's modest background which is atypical for a politician enables him to be closer to common people which represent the majority of the American population. As Johann F. Price, one of his biographers, noted as far as Barack Obama is concerned: "Unlike other presidents coming from powerful families, upbringing was in humble circumstances (xii)." Generally speaking, a political career is made easier when the person holds a famous name or a name which represents powerful families. Indeed, a name can be a springboard to boost one's career especially at the beginning. Barack Obama's case differs from the majority of the other presidents. He is issued from a modest family. His father was a Kenyan student in economy who then embraced a political career. Whatever money and prestige he got from this career never affected Barack Obama since his father lived far from him in Kenya. His mother, a student at the birth of Obama, became an anthropologist. His maternal grandparents who also led a modest living bred Obama. His grandfather was a salesman who never had real success. His grandmother worked rather successfully in a bank. All the persons that surrounded Obama had never had much money. Obama himself left a very well paid job in a company to embrace the career of community organizer, a very modestly-paid job. As one of his biographers concludes about his social background, Obama "doesn't fit in any typical political mold" (Price XII).

3. The Building of Barack Obama's Personality:

Barack Obama's multiple inspirations in the building of his personality prove an additional asset in confronting the racial problem.

3.1. Women's Influence:

A biographer highlighted the importance of women in Obama's life, "they were the ballast in his life, and it was the women who kept him and his family afloat and kept his world centered" (Price 15). Obama confirmed this point (*Audacity* 346.) Three women had a tremendous impact on Obama's personality. His maternal grandmother "Toots", his mother of course, but also his wife Michelle had influenced him at different periods of his life. During his childhood, his mother and grandmother had been the beacons that enabled him to grow up. Nowadays, Michelle, his wife provides the support he needs in the difficult career of politician. As a smart and wise woman, she often helps him taking difficult decisions. Other women had also marked Barack Obama's life to a lesser extent: Maya his Kenyan sister and Ruby, a community organizer in Chicago.

3.2. Father's Influence on Obama's Personality

Even if he lived very little with his father (the latter left him when he was two-years old), Barack Obama's father was the most significant role model for him. Indeed, Obama tried hard to live up to his father's example (Von Zumbusch 6). His own mother advised young Obama to follow his father's example and told him many stories about him. She insists that Obama looks more like his father: "You have to thank me for your eyebrows... your father has these little wispy eyebrows that don't amount to much. But your brains, your character, you got from him" (Obama, *Dreams* 33). His father was indeed very smart; he was one of the most intelligent of Kenya's youth. Indeed, he was sent to the United States to receive a superior education to

return to Kenya and benefit his country. Even the prestigious and highly selective university of Harvard admitted him.

His father's absence marked deeply Barack Obama all throughout his childhood but especially during his adolescence. Even as an adult, Obama feels the need of having a father. He wrote, "I think about him often... Men often long for their father's approval, to shine in their father's light" (qtd. in Price 19). We understand through his biography that Obama does not feel anger towards his father. He is not genuinely angry against his father for abandoning him while he was only two years old. It is more a deep sadness that he holds towards his father's absence (Price 19). He missed the appreciation that young men demand from their father.

Maya Soetero, Barack Obama's Indonesian half-sister summed up her brother's influences in an interview to the *Chicago Tribune*:

Looking back now, I'd say he really is a kind of the perfect combination of all of them. All of them were imperfect but all of them loved him fiercely, and I believe he took the best qualities from each of them. (qtd. in Price 15)

In fact, all the close relatives of Obama contributed in shaping Obama's personality. This is why his half-sister said he is a combination: he took some features of every person who was dear to him.

3.3. The Contribution of Obama's Grandparents to his Character:

To different degrees, Obama's grandparents had a significant influence on him (Price 7). One could perceive traits of each grandparent's character in Obama's own personality. Undoubtedly, Stanley and Madelyn Dunham, his maternal grandparents

had the biggest influence on him since he spent most of his childhood living with them. Stanley Dunham, who was called “Gramps” by little Obama, was a tolerant and highly ambitious man who would not satisfy with what he holds and often changed place to nourish his ambition and thirst for adventure. Barack Obama took from his grandfather’s character a certain ambition and a need to move from place to place. Obama’s grandmother that he called “toots” was a wise woman that had what one may call the intelligence of life. She knew how to treat people. Obama somehow also took these features from his maternal grandmother.

As for his paternal grandparents, Barack Obama had not the chance to know them but because of genetics, he also derived some features of their personality. Akumu, his grandmother, was a rebel who would not accept harsh treatment and oppression and fled several times from her husband’s (Obama’s grandfather) household (Price 5). Barack Obama also refuses to see oppression in the American society, and he tries to cure these wrongs but he does not flee like his grandmother. Onyango, his Kenyan grandfather was a special man. He worked for the British colonists as a cook and related to them, but it was primarily to learn from them (Price 4). He then went back to his native village and applied all that was positive in the white man’s culture such as effective farming techniques, the use of herbs to heal people and of course the rigorous rules of hygiene which was something crucial to him. He was very severe and demanding with his wives and children, but he was just. Far from being as severe, Obama got from this distant relative a certain ability to learn things and a certain discipline. All of Obama’s grandparents either maternal or paternal had strong personalities and they had one thing in common: they do not live like the rest of the society; they are somehow exceptional and do not conform. All these influences helped shape deeply the exceptionality of Obama’s personality.

4. Religious Appurtenance:

4.1. Obama: Not very Religious:

Part of a man's identity is religion. Indeed, religion shapes one's personality. Thus, let us look into Obama's religious appurtenance to assess further his potential for easing race relations. Barack Obama grew up in an environment that was not very religious as he claimed himself: "I was not raised in a religious household" (qtd. in Pedersen 21). His mother and his maternal grandparents with whom he spent most of his childhood seem to be atheist. Obama does not report any religious fervor or rite while he was living with these persons. He remembers:

In our household the Bible, the Koran, and the Bhagavad Gitamat [stood] on the shelf alongside Books of Greek and Norse and African mythology. On Easter or Christmas Day, my mother might drag me to church, just as she dragged me to the Buddhist temple, the Chinese New Year Celebration, the Shinto Shrine, and ancient Hispanic burial sites. (qtd. in Pedersen 22)

These memories highlight the absence of a fixed religion for Barack Obama's maternal family. Moreover, something worth noticing in this passage is young Obama's multiple influences. From his early childhood, he has been acquainted to an incredible variety of cultures and religions. While it may not be something positive for a child who is looking for his marks, these experiences are inevitably enriching.

In fact, all throughout his life, he has been exposed to various religions and consequently he has rather an eclectic religious background. His father and his paternal grandfather were presumed to be Muslims even if the former later gave up

this religion. Lolo Soetero, his Indonesian stepfather, was a moderate Muslim who incorporated animism, Buddhism and Hinduism (Pedersen 20). In Indonesia, Obama had been exposed to various religions and went to different religious schools: “In Indonesia, I had spent two years at a Muslim school, two years at a Catholic school” (*Dreams* 86). However, he did not embrace either religion; he even adds in his autobiography, “I realized then...that I was a heretic” (*Dreams* 91). Even if Obama has been exposed to many religions, we fail to detect a real religious fervor, and one may explain this by the fact that he grew up in a household in which religion had not a significant place. His mother and his maternal grandparents having been his major influences, Obama could not grow highly religious.

He is nevertheless undoubtedly a Christian contrary to what some individuals claimed during his first presidential campaign in 2008. They labeled him as a Muslim due to his middle name “Hussein” and his attendance of a Muslim *Madrassa* in Indonesia. Some journalists and observers accused him of being a Muslim as if it were a fault or a crime to be a Muslim. However, he denied these accusations. Nevertheless, this shows us something of crucial importance about the American society: it is still prejudiced. Indeed, as Collin Powell noted on “Meet the Press” that wondering if Obama was a Muslim was not the right attitude (Pedersen 20). Powell asked, “Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country” (qtd. in Pedersen 20)? Indeed in an unprejudiced society, one’s religious appurtenance should not be an obstacle for being a president. In a post-racial society like the United States claim to be, a Muslim running for president should not be a problem. Since this is surely a problem for the Americans, their society is still prejudiced.

4.2. The Impact of Obama's Exposure to Various Religions:

Barack Obama's exposure to the major religions all throughout his life: Protestantism in the United States, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Animism in Indonesia and Islam and Animism in Africa adds something worth mentioning in his personality. Exposure to various religions made him tolerant which is a very significant quality that politicians often lack. As Carl Pedersen, one of his biographers, pointed out:

Obama's exposure to a number of religions and his shifting religious identity arguably made him more conscious and tolerant of the growing diversity of religions in America in the decades following the 1965 Immigration Act. (23)

These awareness and tolerance are key qualities that enable Obama as a politician not only to prevent him from judgments but also to identify with adepts of different faiths. This religious open-mindedness is an essential feature that the president of the United States should have because of the ever-growing diversity in America.

II. Obama's Frequent Residential Moves and their Impact on His Personality:

1. His Frequent Residential Moves:

All throughout his life, Barack Obama has frequently moved places. Be it as a child with his mother or his grandparents or as an adult, he often changed residence. These frequent residential moves had molded the particularity of his character. Barack Obama was born in Hawaii, and he spent his early childhood there. In 1967, at the age of six, Obama left Hawaii to go to Indonesia with his mother who had married Lolo

Soetero, an Indonesian student. He spent four years there. In 1971, Barack Obama, then 10 years old, went back to Hawaii to live with his grandparents in order to receive an American education (Price xv). In 1979, he went to the mainland, more precisely to Los Angeles, in order to attend Occidental College. Three years later, he moved from the Western coast to the Eastern one to attend Columbia University in New York. After completing his education, he chose to go to Chicago in 1985 and worked as a community organizer; he was then 24. In 1988, the prestigious Harvard Law School situated in Cambridge in the state of Massachusetts admitted him and he went there in order to complete his education. The same year, he made his first trip to Kenya to trace back his ancestors (Prize xvi). Finally, after his election as Senator for the state of Illinois, he settled in Washington, D.C. where he has been living up to now occupying the White House as the president of the United States of America. Despite all these frequent residential moves, Barack Obama feels fully American as he pointed out: “What’s interesting is how deeply American I feel, considering this exotic background” referring to his African roots and his Hawaiian and Indonesian sojourns (qtd. in Price 1).

2. Living in Hawaii, a Melting Pot:

By the time Barack Obama was born, the American government has just recently incorporated the state of Hawaii to the United States of America. Hawaii is particular when compared to the rest of the American states. Obama had the chance to grow in Hawaii rather than in any other American state. First, Hawaii embodies the American idea of the “melting pot”; it is viewed as the sole true melting pot where different races merge together (Wagner 8). One may also consider this state as an experiment in racial harmony. The Hawaiian population is varied; it comprises Hawaiians of course but significant numbers of Japanese-Americans, Filipinos and

Portuguese. Obama says of Hawaii highlighting its diversity and particularity: “there were too many races, with power among them to diffuse, to impose the mainland’s rigid caste system” (*Dreams* 19). Obama means by this description that the presence of such diversity prevents the same racial domination and oppression of the Mainland to be applied in Hawaii so that the different “races” coexist on a more or less equal basis. Indeed, power is “diffused” i.e.: divided among the different races; it is not concentrated. Obama’s father who once visited him while he was in Hawaii noted about that island that:

One thing other nations can learn from Hawaiians is the willingness of races to work together towards a common development; this was something whites in other places are too often unwilling to do. (qtd. in Obama, *Dreams* 21)

Indeed, in Hawaii, the different races seem to be in symbiosis and work hand in hand for the benefit of their state.

Nevertheless, one cannot say that Hawaii was ideal because in reality the black population is insufficiently represented in that state as Obama noted: there were “so few Blacks” there (*Dreams* 19). Nevertheless, even if Blacks are under-represented there, Hawaii remains exceptional by its racial diversity and tolerance when compared to the rest of the American states. Growing in such diversity had conferred on Obama certain qualities such as tolerance and awareness of cultural diversity and richness.

3. His Sojourn in Indonesia: an Enriching Experience:

As a child, Obama moved to Jakarta, Indonesia upon his mother’s marriage to an Indonesian. The change was abrupt for him as he found himself in a completely

new environment so drastically different from Honolulu, Hawaii. Everything was new to him: the surroundings, the stepfather, the language, the religion and the way of life as Heather Lehr Wagner, another biographer of Obama, pointed out:

They were in Indonesia and six-year-old Barack Obama suddenly found himself immersed in a new life with a new stepfather surrounded by people speaking a language he did not understand. (Wagner 18)

First, Obama was used to an urban environment: Honolulu being a modern American city. Jakarta was the opposite: a kind of big village where people still led an ancestral way of life. Indeed, as pointed out by Wagner: “they still bathed and washed their clothes in the river and there were more rickshaws than cars in the streets” (18). In addition, Indonesians had a very different diet from the Americans and Obama had new food experiences. He tasted raw green chili peppers, dog meat, snake meat and roasted grasshoppers (Wagner 19; Obama, *Dreams* 26).

In addition, in Indonesia, Obama was exposed to misery and poverty that touched many people then. He described the place in which destitution was pervasive:

They (beggars) seemed to be everywhere, a gallery of ill men, women, children, in battered clothing matted with dirt, some without arms, others without feet, victims of scurvy or polio or leprosy walking on their hands or rolling down the crowded sidewalks in jerry-built carts. (*Dreams* 26)

Even if the sight of destitution and extreme poverty is difficult to bear especially for such a young child, it has some positive impact on the personality of an individual. It makes the person despise materialism and reflect on the real value of money. It makes

also the individual conscious about human sufferance. His sojourn in Indonesia taught Barack Obama these valuable lessons, things he could not have been in contact with, had he lived exclusively in the United States.

Similarly, another aspect that was unfamiliar to young Obama is Indonesia's main religion: Islam. Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation. His sojourn in Indonesia highlights his early exposure to Islam. His stepfather Soetero is himself a moderate Muslim. That exposure proved beneficial to the future president since it gives him insights into one of the major religions of the world, most importantly in such an international context that he confronted while becoming the president of the United States. It is a context of struggle against terrorism as well as prejudice and discrimination against Muslims. Because he lived in Indonesia several years, he realized that the Muslim religion does not preach violence as many Americans actually pretend. One's exposure to a religion gives some understanding of that religion. This legacy proved highly valuable in the context of the 'war on terror' that President Obama inherited from his predecessor George W. Bush.

It was overall a rich experience to live in Indonesia. This country bestowed upon Obama many valuable traits of character. First, it taught him modesty as he befriended children of humble social backgrounds. He described this particular friendship: "The children of farmers, servants and low-level bureaucrats had become my best friends" (qtd. in Wagner 19). Obama's mother had a crucial role in her son's formative years in Indonesia. She encouraged him to integrate into the Indonesian society but without forgetting his racial identity. Obama describes Indonesia's contribution to his character as such:

She [his mother] had always encouraged my rapid acculturation in Indonesia. It had made me relatively self-sufficient, undemanding on a tight budget, and extremely well mannered when compared to other American children. She had taught me to disdain the blend of ignorance and arrogance that too often characterized Americans abroad (*Dreams* 31).

In this passage, Obama emphasizes the importance of his mother's guidance. This was even more important considering the fact that Indonesia could have been a traumatic experience for such a young child who found himself in a drastically different world overnight. To enlarge his knowledge and to remain modest were the two main traits of behavior that Obama benefited from his experience in Indonesia.

Barack Obama is exceptional by the variety of his influences as it was noticed by one his Indonesian acquaintances: "He was exposed to American black culture, American white culture and Indonesian culture," said Kay Ikranagara, who worked with Obama's mother in Jakarta and knew the family well. "He learned that people in all groups should be listened to" (qtd. in "Indonesia Remembers"). Barack Obama himself recognizes the richness bestowed upon him by his exposure to a variety of cultures: "I was raised as an Indonesian child and a Hawaiian child and as a black child and as a white child. And so what I benefit from is a multiplicity of cultures that all fed me" (qtd. in Price 17). Those rich experiences conferred on him an ability to listen to people and certain open-mindedness as well as some tolerance.

4. Obama's Trip to Kenya: a Pilgrimage:

Last, Barack Obama's first trip to Kenya in 1988, the land of his paternal ancestors, has been one of his most enriching, if not his most enriching experience.

Even if he did not live there but just spent few weeks, he derived much from that journey. One biographer highlighted the importance of that trip:

What he finds in Africa was more than just a simple connection to his family. Rather, it was a pilgrimage for this young man who grew up conflicted by his mixed race and by his father's absence that came so early in his life. (Price 1)

To go to Kenya was not indeed just a return to his roots for Obama but an exploration into his father's life, character and a search of his own identity. Obama describes his impressions as follows:

It wasn't simply joy that I felt in each of these moments. Rather, it was a sense that everything that I was doing, every touch and breath and word, carried the full weight of my life.... (qtd. in Price 3)

He compares the United States and Kenya. He granted the latter with the following characteristics: "the insistent pleasure, the joy of human warmth" which contrasts with "the growing isolation of American life" (*Dreams* 178). In Africa, Obama experienced a sense of belonging, as he noted; people knew his name there and it carries a full history. He himself acknowledges that in Kenya: "For the first time in [his] life, [he] felt the comfort, the firmness of identity that a name might provide, how it could carry an entire history in other people's memories" (qtd. in Wagner 9). This is why; Obama's trip to Kenya is often referred to as a pilgrimage. It is a quest for one's roots. For a young man torn by problems of identity, this discovery is priceless and this would change the rest of his life.

In addition to encountering members of his family which was a very extended one since his father and grandfather married several wives, he could learn about the history of his family especially his grandfather, grandmother and most importantly about his father. This was all the more crucial to Obama since his father had been a mysterious figure for him. Barack Obama Senior left his family when Barack was two years old. He never saw him again until the age of ten when Barack Obama senior has been to Hawaii for one month (Wagner 8).

III. Obama's Experience with Race:

1. His Maternal Grandparents and Race:

Since they had an incommensurable influence on Barack Obama during his childhood and adolescence, the maternal grandparents' perception of race is worth examining. "Gramps" and "Toots", as Obama used to call them familiarly, did not seem to be racist. They proved to be racially tolerant. One can perceive this tolerance when they happened to encounter persons of different races. In reality, as Obama noticed, the notion of race is almost inexistent in their conversations as well as their minds:

For my grandfather, race wasn't something you really needed to worry about anymore; if ignorance still held fast in certain locals, it was safe to assume that the rest of the world would be catching up soon.

(Dreams 20)

Obama noted, "The truth is that, like most White Americans, at that time, they had never really given Black people much thought" (*Dreams 16*). For Obama's

grandparents as for many other white people, Blacks were “silent presences that elicit neither passion nor fear.” His maternal grandparents lived most of their lives in this way. Only three significant episodes markedly confronted them with the reality of race. Firstly, Obama’s grandfather used to change place very frequently. In the 1950s, the family moved to Texas. It was there that the family encountered racism. In his autobiography, Barack Obama pointed out: “It was not until my family moved to Texas, after the war, that questions of race began to intrude on their lives” (*Dreams* 16). Indeed, his mother Ann, then a little girl, befriended a black girl of the same age. This caused problem to the family because the society strongly disapprove interracial friendship. This can be seen since the first day when the two girls played together and other children screamed and threw stones at them (Wagner 14). They were harassed for an innocent child’s friendship. They were told, “white girls don’t play with coloreds in this town” (*Dreams* 17). In addition, racial discrimination between the members of different races was pervasive in Texas. The following episode shows the preferential treatment:

As a furniture salesman, Stanley Dunham was told by his co-workers that Black and Hispanic customers could only come to the store after hours and then needed to make their own arrangements for delivering furniture. (Wagner 13-14)

According to Obama, the family who was not used to such way of life left Texas because of racism.

Secondly, one could not prove the tolerance of Obama’s grandparents through their reaction to the interracial dating of their daughter Ann, Obama’s mother. Obama mentions in his autobiography that when his mother Ann announced her parents her

dating with a black man, their instant reaction was to invite him over for dinner (Price 9). Barack Obama relates this episode as such: “And so, when my mother came home one day and mentioned a friend she had met at the University of Hawaii, an African student named Barack, their first impulse was to invite him over for dinner” (*Dreams* 16). His grandfather even added: “the poor kid’s probably lonely, so far away from home” (*Dreams* 16). Later, at the occasion of their first encounter with the young African, the Dunhams were first careful, but his intelligence and oratory style very rapidly impressed them. Obama’s autobiography includes the narration of this episode: “The girl’s parents, wary at first, were soon won over by his charm and intellect” (*Dreams* 12). Barack Obama wrote in his autobiography, “Whether Gramps realized it or not, the sight of his daughter with a black man offered at some deep unexplored level a window into his own heart” (*Dreams* 18). This passage means that as it was the case with the majority of non-racist Whites, these persons never thought deeply about the black people. They consider themselves as non-racist, but in fact they have never really investigated the issue. The confrontation with the reality of the existence of black people comes when one of them enters their immediate surroundings. In this case, it is the introduction of a black person as a potential son-in-law.

2. Barack Obama: Issued from an Interracial Union:

At the time of Obama’s parents encounter and union in the 1960s, the interracial intercourse, or unions, was still highly condemned and disapproved. Obama portrays the situation at that time:

In 1960, the year my parents were married, miscegenation still described a felony in over half the states in the union. In many parts of

the South, my father could have been stung up from a tree for merely looking at my mother the wrong way; in the most sophisticated of Northern cities, the hostile stares, the whispers might have driven a woman in my mother's predicament into a back-alley abortion-or at the very least to a distant convent that would arrange for abortion. ... Their very image together would have been considered lurid and perverse.

(Dreams 13)

Nevertheless, the idyll between Ann Dunham, a white Kansan girl and Barack Obama, a Kenyan young man took place in Hawaii. This type of relationship could not perhaps have been possible in the rest of the US mainland especially in the Southern states as depicted by Obama himself. Fortunately for them, Hawaii was considered as a melting pot and a haven of tolerance in comparison with the rest of the American states. Nevertheless, even in Hawaii interracial unions were rare as described in the following passage: "Although Hawaii reflected the idea of America as a "melting pot" it was still uncommon at that time for a white woman and a black man to date, let alone to marry" (Wagner 8). The parents' acceptance of the union between their daughter and a black man reveals their degree of tolerance, and it shows also that Ann was not a conformist. She did whatever she wanted regardless of people's opinions. As one of Obama's biographers wrote, "Obama's mother was not worried about conventions and social customs" (Wagner 8). Thus, the story of Obama's parents is somehow exceptional. Later, Obama reflecting on the interracial union of his parents, acknowledged feeling amazed at his grandparent's acceptance of the union. He wrote that the grandparents' approval "remains an enduring puzzle to [him]" (*Dreams 13*). Moreover, the fact that their grandson, i.e.: Barack Obama, was

issued from a mixed parentage was not really a genuine concern to the grandparents, and they brought him up with care and affection as if he were their own son.

Obama was finally born out of this bi-racial union. One should bear in mind that such births were relatively uncommon at that time. Nonetheless, being the fruit of an interracial union places Obama in a special position regarding the race problem. Belonging somehow to two worlds: the white and the black ones, he is a kind of link between the two communities. Theoretically, he can understand the feelings of both Whites and Blacks. This dual influence is a feature that is worthwhile for the politician of a nation suffering from a racial divide. Obama himself highlighted this aspect in the preface of the 2004 edition of his autobiography *Dreams from my Father: a Story of Race and Inheritance*. He expressed his firm belief that the story of his family “might speak in some way to the fissures of race that have characterized the American experience, as well as the fluid state of identity... that mark our modern life” (16). Even if being bi-racial may be at first glance attractive, it leads undoubtedly to problems of identity.

3. On the Quest of a Racial Identity:

3.1. Being Bi-Racial, an Even More Difficult Existence:

A conflictual identity marked Barack Obama’s life due to his mixed racial background. He is White through his white mother and Black through his African father. He is theoretically a bi-racial. Both worlds left their imprint on him. First, he grew up in a predominately-white environment not in a ghetto. Indeed, he spent his childhood with his mother and/or his white maternal grandparents. Thus, he was more exposed to Whites’ beliefs, thoughts and way of living. Nevertheless, he seemed to have derived more his character from his father as his mother herself acknowledges.

Therefore, Obama is particular in that he was influenced by both Whites' and Blacks' worlds. He received a white education but his temperament and intelligence were his father's legacy. Moreover, though of a mixed union, Americans view him as an African

-American. Otherwise said, according to the "one drop rule", he is classified as a Black American. He has been living a black person's life.

This conflictual struggle for identity did not start early in Barack Obama's life. During his small childhood, Barack Obama was not conscious of the existence of races within humanity. He did not reflect on his own belonging to a certain race. This lack of consciousness is visible through the following remark that Obama wrote in his autobiography: "That my father looked nothing like people around me- that he was black as pitch, my mother white as milk- barely registered in my mind" (*Dreams* 12). Referring to his early childhood, he commented that: "[he] was too young to know that [he] needed a race" (*Dreams* 21). For childhood is the time of heedlessness not the time of deep reflections.

3.2. Obama's Consciousness of his Race:

His mother provided one of Obama's earliest experiences with the concept of race. Very early in his life, she provided him with the necessary information about his racial heritage. She gave him documentation on the Civil Rights Movement. She even defined for him the meaning of being Black: "To be Black was to be the beneficiary of a great inheritance, a special destiny, glorious burdens that only [we] were strong enough to bear" (*Dreams* 33). From the time he was in Indonesia, his mother insisted that he learned about his racial heritage. One of his biographers wrote, "Ann was adamant that he learns about race, heritage and about being an American" (Price 21).

He added, “All the information confused Barry [this was the nickname given to Barack Obama in Indonesia] about who he was, where he came from and his mixed-race heritage” (Price 21). Indeed, such an amount of information disturbed Obama’s young mind, especially when the information is about a very complicated and controversial subject that is race.

At this time, a revelation of racial consciousness came through a picture that he discovered among the documentation his mother gave him. That picture represented a turning point in Obama’s quest of identity (*Dreams* 34). This photography displayed a man who received chemical treatment to lighten his complexion. That man regretted about trying to pass himself off as a white man. The article informed Obama that thousands of black men and women had undergone the same treatment, which promised happiness as a white person. This photograph shocked Obama’s young mind. He wrote, “As in a dream, I had no voice for my newfound fear” (*Dreams* 22). Because of this discovery, his thoughts changed forever. In his autobiography, he wrote, “but my vision was permanently altered” (*Dreams* 34). He began to notice the inferior position of Blacks through television. Apparently, he was not conscious before that incident of the oppression of his counterparts and their will to become white or to model them.

Another anecdote goes in a similar direction: that is a remark said by Frank an old black poet, one of his grandfather’s friends. One day he complained to young Obama of a pain in his feet. According to Obama: “he complained about his feet, the corns and bone spurs that he insisted were a direct result of trying to force African feet into European shoes” (*Dreams* 57). This is a powerful metaphor referring to Blacks being forced to live as Whites. That is the idea of forced assimilation. Blacks cannot live as they want; they are forced to integrate and to conform to the white

man's culture. Following these two episodes, Obama became conscious about the tragedy touching the black community.

4. Obama's Early Experience with Racism:

4.1. In Indonesia: a Sense of Non-Belonging:

Barack Obama encountered racist attitudes for the first time in Indonesia. Obama tends to refer to Indonesia in very positive terms. He emphasizes the fact that he underwent a very enriching experience when he lived in Indonesia. He seldom relates any negative attitude towards him. Nevertheless, journalists accounted for a rather difficult experience for the future president. They found out that "he was known as 'Barry Soetero' and was a chubby boy teased by the children in the neighborhood because of his physical appearance" (Wagner 19). Barack Obama himself acknowledges a sense of non-belonging through the following remark:

I have wonderful memories of the place [Indonesia], but there's no doubt that, at some level, I understood that I was different. It meant that I was, maybe, not part of the community as much as I might have been, otherwise. On the other hand, it also gave me an appreciation of what it means to be an American. (qtd. in Price 19)

As Obama went to Indonesia as a child, he could perceive that he was not like the Indonesian children. Children can prove very cruel sometimes, and Obama's distinct physical appearance brought their mockery. One can guess that it was not really the color of his skin that the other children emphasized- Indonesians may be even darker in complexion than him- but rather the texture of his hair, or the shape of his eyes. One may consider these characteristics as racial. As Israella Pereira, one of his former

neighbors remembers: “His mother was white, his father was Indonesian, and here was a black, chubby boy with curly hair. It was a big question mark for us” (“Indonesia remembers”). She added that most Indonesians had little contact with foreigners. Thus, even if it was motivated by ignorance, racial prejudice tinged the Indonesian children’s reaction to young Barack Obama.

4.2. In Hawaii: Growing Aware of his Blackness:

Another place of residence for Obama was Hawaii. Even though Hawaii was known as a melting pot where many races coexisted, Obama noted, “In such surroundings, my racial stock caused my grandparents few problems” (*Dreams* 20). Here, he means that his appearance created only little trouble to his grandparents. Because of the surrounding diversity, Obama’s physical appearance did not stand out. Another story worth mentioning is the racial experience of Obama’s father in Hawaii:

Although he hasn’t experienced any problems himself, he detects self-segregation and overt discrimination taking place between the various ethnic groups and expressed wry amusement at the fact that “Caucasians” in Hawaii are occasionally at the reaching end of prejudice. (*Dreams* 20)

As his son mentioned here, Barack Obama, Sr. faced no racist attitudes or acts. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the existence of racial prejudice in Hawaii despite the American state’s reputation of being a haven of tolerance. He also added something worth noting: not only the colored are victims of racism, but it also happens that Whites may be the targets.

Nevertheless, Obama himself faced the consciousness of his racial difference when he returned to Hawaii after his sojourn in Indonesia. He was admitted to a prestigious school, a school for the elite: Punahou School Academy. Though Punahou seemed to be heaven on earth, it was there that young Obama knew one of his earliest and most significant confrontation with race. A student from Punahou wrote in the *Chicago Tribune*: “Punahou was an amazing school. But it could be a lonely place. Those who were Black did feel isolated_ there’s no question about that” (qtd. in Price 24). Indeed, Obama related in his autobiography his first day in class as such: “When she read my full name, I heard titters break across the room” (*Dreams* 38). Another source corroborates this fact: “As the teacher took attendance, she read Barry’s name.... [As a result,] there were giggles throughout the class” (Price 23). Obama’s classmates mocked his strange name and physical appearance. Later, some asked him to touch his hair and others inquired if his father ate human beings referring to the widespread stereotype of Africans being cannibals (Price 23). These reactions clashed with the otherwise reputation of Hawaii as a haven of tolerance. One may explain these attitudes by the fact that Punahou Academy was an elite school and as such was dominated by Whites; very few Blacks had the opportunity to attend such a prestigious and highly selective school. Obama’s first day at Punahou Academy deeply marked the young child as after class, he went directly to his bedroom.

5. Obama’s Enduring Confusion about his Identity:

After these early experiences, a feeling of non-belonging grew in Obama. He acknowledges, “My sense that I did not belong continued to grow.” He increasingly realized that he could not be classified in any category. He is not completely Black, and he is not thoroughly White. He realized that he was growing up to be a Black man in America; the trouble was neither he nor anyone around him knew what this implied

(Price 26). This largely disturbed his internal side as he said, “I was engaged in a fitful interior struggle. I was trying to raise myself to be a Black man in America, and beyond the given of my appearance, no one around me seemed to know exactly what that meant” (*Dreams* 46). While he was combating his problems of identity, he decided to turn to basketball. For him, it was the single milieu in which being Black was not a problem. His biographer Price noticed, “on the court, Barry found a community where being Black wasn’t a disadvantage” (48). On the opposite, being Black was an advantage in the milieu of basketball as Blacks are generally very skilful at this sport. Thus, Obama took refuge in this sport to evade the pervasive racial prejudice and discrimination towards Blacks in all fields.

Nevertheless, the confusion was such that it completely upset the young man. He even resorted to drugs and alcohol to try to alleviate his sufferance. One of his biographers wrote, “He put his studies aside, still struggling with who he was and experimented with drugs and alcohol to try to put the struggle out of his mind” (Price 26). Even if the confusion that the minority members undergo is genuine, that feeling is exacerbated in the case of a bi-racial. The person does belong neither to the white world nor to the black world. Either world never fully accepts the bi-racial individual; for Whites, he is not purely white and for Blacks, he is not completely black.

It entails a natural eagerness to belong somewhere in order to be able to situate oneself, to have marks in one’s life. This natural sense of belonging is lacking in Obama’s young life. He noted himself, “A vision that filled me with longing-a longing for place, and a fixed and definite history” (*Dreams* 62). His words powerfully reflect this uncertainty about his identity reflected when he asserted, “I was different... I had no idea who my own self was (*Dreams* 50). Obama derived a certain fear, “the constant, crippling fear that I didn’t belong” (*Dreams* 65). This

internal struggle was at its summit in the adolescence. Having reached the adult age, he still struggled with his identity, but he learned how to switch from one world to another in a hope that he would be able to reconcile between the two. He wrote: “I learned to slip back and forth between my black and white worlds... the two worlds would eventually cohere” (*Dreams* 50). Obama’s confusion stems from the society’s pressure to categorize individuals. Individuals are classified according to their culture or religion while identity is more extended. According to Indian philosopher Amartya Sen, the identity should not “be miniaturized”:

It is only by acknowledging that each individual possesses a multiplicity of identities that violence predicated on the fervent belief in rigid demarcation of groups according to ethnic belonging and/or religious affiliation can be abrogated. (qtd. in Wagner 17)

Through its forceful categorization, the society forces the individual to confine his identity. This is what happened to Obama; hence the violence of the process. In Obama’s case, he had to abandon his multiple identities. People rigidly classified him as Black. His White background and influences were utterly denied.

6. The Double Difficulty of Being a Bi-Racial Politician:

It is much more difficult for a bi-racial person to be a politician than for a person of a single race. In general, people tolerate black or bi-racial individuals as long as they remain polite and do not disturb them as Barack Obama noticed: “People were satisfied so long as you were courteous and smiled and made no sudden moves” (*Dreams* 56). Thus, finding Obama a well-educated and witty person, people generally enjoy his temperament. These are features that are, according to Whites, unusual in black people as mentioned in the following passage, “It was a pleasant

surprise to find a well-mannered young Black man who did not seem angry all the time” (qtd. in *Dreams* 56). Even if the manners of Obama as a person please people, this does not mean that they would vote for him. Because of the persistence of racial prejudice in the minds of Americans, it is still difficult for a member of a racial minority to succeed in politics. Motivated by their prejudice, people in general do not trust the person or at least, they think that he would not be able to perform the job as well as a white person.

Though belonging to the bi-racial category, Obama is considered as Black. The task is much harder for black politicians than it is for the white ones. The former have to walk somehow on eggs with both their own community and the white majority. Writers depict satisfactorily this matter-of-fact, “Black politicians like Obama have to prove that they are not abandoning the African-American community ... while no longer concerning themselves with just racial grievances and civil rights” (Dupuis and Boeckelman 76). To gain the confidence of both communities, Black politicians have to find some equilibrium. They have to show their community their loyalty and work to alleviate the sufferance of the members of that community while not limiting themselves to this sole task. Indeed, a politician, whatever his color, is supposed to represent the whole population and to work for the whole community. A black politician that emphasizes solely racial issues would quickly bother the white population, who forms the majority. Thus, he should let neither community with the impression of being neglected. Obama proved to be very skilful at this task highlighting the grievances, feelings and hopes of each community, neither emphasizing nor belittling any community. A writer acknowledges this capacity in Obama, “He spoke of black anger as well as white resentment in an attempt to come to grips with the flawed reasoning that sustained the gap between the races” (Pedersen

48). Here, Barack Obama not only legitimizes Blacks' anger but also understands the resentment felt by the white community. African-Americans in general and African-American politicians in particular seldom acknowledge that Whites also may feel resentful. Thus, by playing the card of white resentment, he does not alienate the white community. At the same time by sanctioning the right of Blacks to be angry, Obama will have the trust of the black community.

Another difficulty that confronted Obama is his outstanding background that looks nothing like that of the traditional black leaders. This particularity increases his efforts to make himself adopted by the black community as their leader. His legitimacy for being a leader of the black community was questioned on the ground that he was not a descendant of slaves. His ancestors did not endure the strains of slavery. Indeed, he is the son of a Kenyan father and an American mother, and as such he has not in his family lineage any former slaves. Many members of the black community considered this as a grave defect. In addition to that, he had to convince the older generation of the black leaders whose recognition is necessary for an acceptance of leadership by the black people. For that purpose, he acknowledges the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement and its positive impact on the lives of the younger generation of Blacks. He says in a famous speech, "I'm here because somebody marched. I'm here because you all sacrificed for me. I stand on the shoulders of giants" (qtd. In Pedersen 49). He admits that without the efforts of the people engaged in the Civil Rights Movement, it would not have been possible for him to reach such high level in politics and to campaign for the American presidency. In this way, he could overcome one of the multiple hurdles in his political career: the skepticism of the older black leaders (Pedersen 49).

In terms of history of race relations, he seems to hold an objective view, a perception not tainted by his appurtenance to the black community. In assessing the present state of race relations, he admits the improvements that the United States went through. As far as the lot of Blacks is concerned, he warns that the present racial inequality is not solely caused by the impact of slavery and its years of exploitation. In accordance, one of his biographers wrote, “He acknowledged the legacy of slavery and racial injustice that still affected the African-Americans while arguing that blaming it alone would ultimately stifle any chance for change” (Pedersen 46). According to him, change could not be possible if the black community puts all the blame of their inferiority on the institution of slavery.

IV. The Extent of the American Electorate’s Identification with Obama:

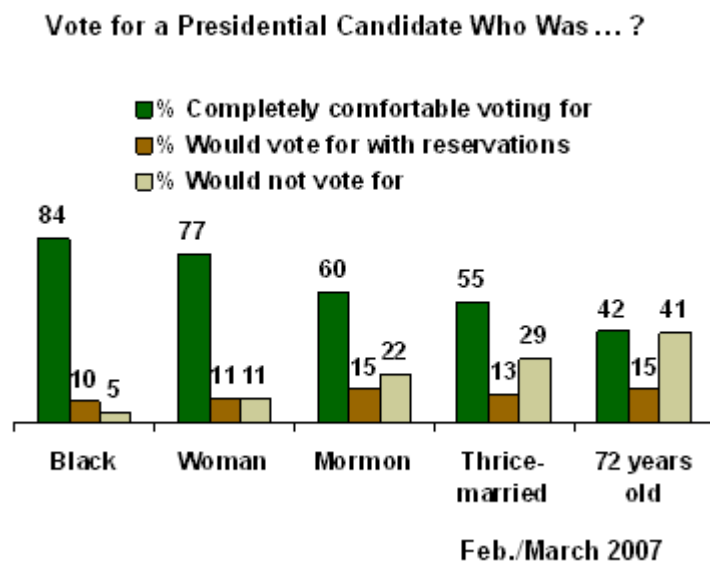
The previous section of this work tackled Barack Obama’s background and personality to assess his potential for improving race relations, thereby decreasing racial prejudice. In the following section, one will examine the American electorate and the extent of its identification with Barack Obama. Is his electorate based on Black voters? What about the other racial minorities, did they vote for him? To what extent do white voters identify with him? To what extent does the black community itself gather behind him? All these are questions on which one will try to ponder.

1. Voters’ Changing Attitude Towards Race:

Before the election of Barack Obama to the presidency, there was evidence that the Americans changed attitude as compared to the past. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, racism has been steadily declining. Culminating in the Civil

Rights Movement in the 1960s, the struggle against racism brought some important victories like the legal outlawing of racial discrimination. At that time, public opinion thought that the American society could eradicate racism. Many people believe sincerely that the United States is no longer racist. Reality is otherwise, and racism still exists in the United States. Its extent, however, is a matter of debate. The logical question is does the accession of a black person to the highest office reflect the end of racial prejudice? One way to answer this question is to examine Obama's electorate to see who voted for him, and most importantly, who did not vote for him.

Surveys showed the progress of the electorate. Of course, one has to be careful with surveys as these are highly controversial evidence. The reliability and validity of such methods are subject to controversy. Still, these are the only ways to scan people's opinions. As a result, one has to be careful in selecting polls undertaken by "serious" organisms. A tendency reflected in the polls is that people were less reluctant to vote for a member of a minority. Some surveys showed that Americans were less likely to discard a candidate on racial ground or because he was a member of a minority group. Accordingly, in March 2007, a *USA Today*/Gallup polls found that 1 in 10 said they would not vote for a woman or a Hispanic and 1 in 20 claimed they would not vote for a Black, a Jewish or Catholic candidate (Page-Gould)

Table 5: Vote for a Presidential Candidate Based on Different Criteria

Source: *USA Today*/ Gallop Polls

These results are highly interesting. First, they show that only a minority of people consider the race, gender, or religion of a person as an eliminating factor for the American presidency. If we translate the results in percentage: 10% would not vote for a woman or a Hispanic while 5% would not vote for a Black, Jewish or Catholic candidate. Thus, this survey clearly shows the decline of racial prejudice. Still, it proves also that it persists because some people refuse to vote for individuals based on their race, gender or religion regardless of the competence of the individual. The third interesting fact is the discrepancy between the members of the minorities. Voters make difference between minority members and favor some to others. For instance, they are less reluctant to vote for a Black, a Jewish or a Catholic than for a woman or a Hispanic. This is surprising since it shows that gender equality is still a myth, and it also reflects the fact that Hispanics more than any other group are not trusted. An element that is worth noting here is the persistence of people's animosity towards

Catholics. Thus, some people are ready to discard a candidate simply because of his/her Catholic faith.

According to the result of some polls, race is no longer an obstacle in the choice of the president. In July 2008, a *Newsweek* poll found that race is no longer “the” eliminating factor for a candidate. A clear majority of 59% says that the country is ready to elect an African-American (“Black and White”). Even if a majority actually voted for Obama enabling him to become the first Black president, one has to assess the real motivations of the voters. People naturally tend to mute their prejudice and to distort their real thoughts in public and in surveys. One may explain this by the fact that the United States is supposed to have entered a post-racial era in which race does no longer matter and in which it is considered as wrong to continue to hold prejudice. As a matter-of-fact, it is very difficult to investigate on people’s mentalities because one can only base one’s interpretation on what people declare; hence the frequent inexactitudes of such studies.

2. Barack Obama, an Obscure Figure for the Voters:

2.1. Uncertainty about Obama’s Identity:

Before the presidential campaign of 2008, some people had already heard about Barack Obama since his election as a state senator for Illinois. Nevertheless, for the majority of people, he was a new figure in politics. As usual, the journalists closely scrutinize the identity, principles and past life of the candidate. Surely, not anyone can hold the most powerful office in the world. Journalists make their maximum to discover any stain in the past of the candidates. The fact that Obama is Black made the ill-intentioned journalists and other people double their efforts. Because of the amount of information, true and false, people felt somehow uneasy

about the true identity and past of Obama. The speculations intensified as he had an unusual profile and background. The fact that he did not spend his childhood and adolescence in the mainland made the verification of episodes of his life very difficult. As a result, *The New York Times* columnist David Brooks argued that voters were “wary and uncertain” of Obama because they were confused about his identity (qtd. in Pedersen 16).

2.2. Controversies Appearing during the Presidential Campaign:

Several controversies came out about the presidential candidate. The two most significant controversies are first, his eligibility since some people claimed that he did not fulfill the “natural born” clause; the second concerned the allegation of Obama being a Muslim. First, journalists and other observers have poured much ink on the fact that he should not be eligible for the American presidency. Some contended that the president should have parents that are American residents. As it is well known, Barack Obama’s father was a Kenyan that came to the United States for studying. He went back to Africa after completing his studies. This was not stipulated in the constitution. It suffices that only one of a president’s parents is of American nationality. Moreover, accusations on his birthplace appeared. The president, as the Constitution stipulates, should be natural born. It means that he should be born within American borders. According to some, Obama was not born in Hawaii as he pretends. Leading this controversy is Republican Donald Trump. Demands for the release of his birth certificate have been ignored for a certain period before a birth certificate was eventually released. Nevertheless, some persons still doubt the validity of the document; a CNN poll evaluates this proportion to a quarter of the Americans. (Travis).

The second allegation is about Obama's religious appurtenance. The assumption that Obama was a Muslim is not only rooted in his first names, which are Arabs names (Barack and Hussein) but also in his attendance to a Muslim school "Madrassa" while in Indonesia. With the international context of the war on terrorism, the word Islam triggered a phobia in the American minds. Obama is obviously not a Muslim. Nevertheless, the confusion occurred in many American minds. To illustrate this, Obama wrote in the preface to *Dreams from my Father*, "As a consequence of 9/11, my name is an irresistible target of mocking websites from overzealous Republican operatives" (*Dreams* 5). As a result, all these allegations deeply disturbed the electorate. In regards of all the challenges that came in his way, it was an exploit for a black candidate to be elected. As mentioned earlier, black candidates not only have to convince both black and white communities but they have to face this relentlessness on the parts of ill-intentioned and racially prejudiced journalists and others who do not base their evaluation on competence or achievements but on other superficial criteria. In this case, there is nothing wrong in being a Muslim. It should not be a disqualifying factor, as the Constitution did not specify it. Why should not the United States have a Muslim president? As a conclusion, the media play an important and surely an excessive role in shaping public opinion, it is very difficult even almost impossible, for ordinary people to distinguish between truths, exaggerations, dissimulations, manipulations and the outright disinformation the media convey.

3. Race: Seemingly Not a Decisive Factor in Obama's Election:

Nonetheless, people could somehow make their opinions and dared elect the first non-white president in American history. Who are the people that voted for Obama? Examining the groups that voted for Obama will enable to assess the extent

of people's identification with Obama. In the 2008 presidential election, Obama received the most votes for a candidate in all American history; he received 69,498,516 votes ("Federal Elections 2008"). Here, it is important to assess the significance of race as a criterion in people's votes. Generally, polls show the relative unimportance of race as a motivating factor for choosing or discarding a candidate. One article noted:

While Obama's supporters expressed concern about the impact of his race on the election, the exit poll suggests that, if anything, the race factor favored Obama. Only a small share of white voters (7%) said that race was important to their vote, and they voted overwhelmingly for McCain (66% to 33%). But their impact was overshadowed by the much larger proportion of whites who said race was not important (92%). ("Inside Obama's Sweeping Victory")

According to polls, race has no longer the importance it once had for electing the president. Of course, one has to bear in mind that the sincerity of people may be doubted. Still, the election of Obama denotes a change of attitude. Accordingly, CNN senior political analyst Bill Schneider pointed out: "race is not a decisive factor in this election" ("Inside"). Indeed, 92 % of the white population claims that race does not motivate them in their choice. In fact, race somehow advantages Obama as the following passage pointed out:

At the same time, there is little doubt that Obama's race was a factor in bringing out large numbers of new African American voters to the polls. Blacks made up a larger share of the electorate in 2008 (13%)

than they did in 2004 (11%) or 2000 (10%), and they supported Obama at higher rates than they did either Kerry or Gore (“Inside”).

Many Black Americans that used to abstain from voting chose to vote in 2008. In addition to that, many members of the racial minorities identified with Obama. Thus, one can say that race is apparently no longer a problem as it used to be in the past.

4. Examining Voter Demographics to assess Electorate’s Identification with Obama:

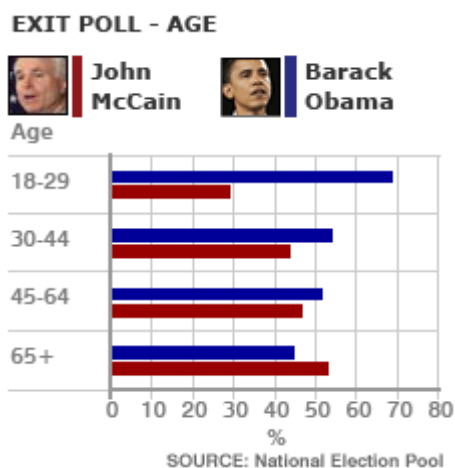
4.1. Age as a Factor:

Next, it would be useful to examine voter demographics in order to show which groups voted for Obama in the 2008 presidential election. The criteria taken into account in the tables present in this section are age, race, gender, political ideology, political party, marital status, religion, religious service attendance, education, family income, sexual orientation, region and community size.

In terms of age, Obama obtained a majority of votes for all ages except for the 65 and older. According to Table 6 and Table 11, the young voters (between 18 and 29) voted massively for Obama. Indeed, 2/3 or 66% gave him their vote. According to an analysis of the National Election Pool exit polls, this massive support on the part of young voters was crucial to Obama’s victory (“Inside”). The tendency is that the younger is the voter, the more likely he votes for Obama. Moreover, one should note that white young voters turned in majority to Obama with an advantage of 54% (“Breakdowns of Demographics”). The Republican candidate McCain’s voters are concentrated in the oldest section of the population. Indeed, as it is visible in Table 10, the latter gathered 53% of the voters that are 65 and over, which is not an

overwhelming majority. To sum up, all ages except the 65 and over voted for Obama, with an overwhelming majority of the young population that gave their voice to the black candidate.

Table 6: Voter Demographic by Age.



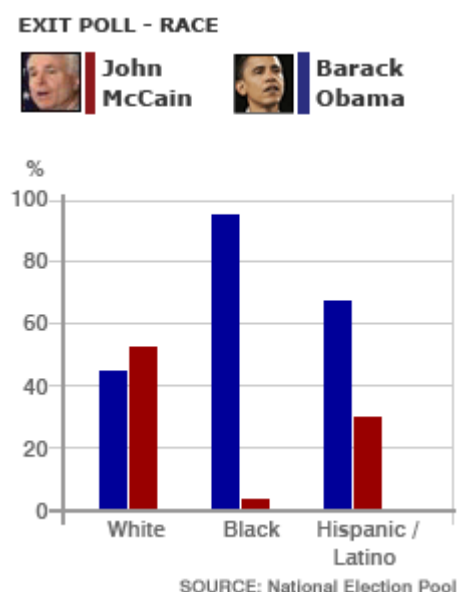
4.2. Voters' Suffrage Based on Race:

Another significant criterion is race. Unsurprisingly, Whites voted more for McCain as visible in Table 7. According to Tables 10 and 11, the latter obtained a majority of 55% while 43% voted for Obama. Here, one should note that 43% is an honorable score given the race of the candidate. According to polls, it is the highest score for a Democrat since 1976 ("Exit polls"). Traditionally, white voters support the Republican Party. Consequently, one cannot assert that Obama's race was responsible for the disadvantage he got with white voters. On the contrary, he scored higher than Democratic candidates did since 1976 election. Nevertheless, and as expected, Obama got a large advance for any other race (the Whites exempted). Overwhelmingly, Blacks voted for Obama at the rate of 95%. Women proved as usual to vote more than Black males ("Breakdown of Demographics"). In fact, Obama's candidacy pushed

many Blacks to go and vote for the first time. This may be considered as a proof of Obama's full legitimacy as the leader of the Afro-Americans.

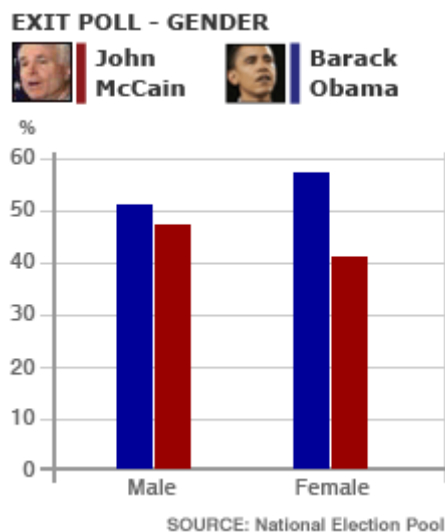
All the other minorities supported Obama at the average rate of 2/3 as visible in the three tables mentioned above. The second largest racial group, the Hispanics, had been widely solicited and courted by the candidate during the campaign. The least one can say is that obviously Obama's efforts were fruitful since 67% of the Hispanics voted for him. It represents the best result ever for a Democrat ("Breakdowns of Democracy"). Similarly, the Asians, which represent only 2% of the population as shown in Table 11, voted at the rate of 62% for Obama. Other races gave their support to Obama at the rate of 66% that represents 2/3 of the totality of the voters. These high scores among the racial minorities highlight their backing and identification with the black candidate. Since the different racial minorities are undergoing the same suffering at the hands of the white majority, they hold wide hopes in a candidate that is issued, like them, from the oppressed minorities.

Table 7: Voter Demographic by Race



4.3. Women-Men's Distinct Voting Behavior:

Thirdly, another significant factor is gender. In this case, there is a difference of backing between the two sexes. This tendency is clearly visible in Table 8. While the two candidates shared male voters on an almost equal basis, female voters clearly preferred Obama. Indeed, 49% of men voted for Obama whereas 48% gave their voice to Mc Cain. Tables 8, 10 and 11 all show this discrepancy, but it is more noticeable in Table 8. Thus, there is not a striking difference between the two candidates. The vote of women, however, made a difference. Women's vote is worth considering because even though they stand as a minority group in terms of their subordinate status, they are in fact a numerical majority. They represent 53% of the whole population of voters. Thus, their vote may make the difference and women backing had been instrumental in Obama's victory. A clear majority of 56% backed Obama as shown in Table 10. Thus, Women's support for Obama is obvious in the 2008 presidential elections. Nevertheless, The Afro-American candidate did not get the support of the majority of the white female voters. Mc Cain had an advantage of 7 points over Obama as far as white women are concerned ("Breakdowns of Demographics"). Despite this disadvantage, women of all other categories preferred Obama.

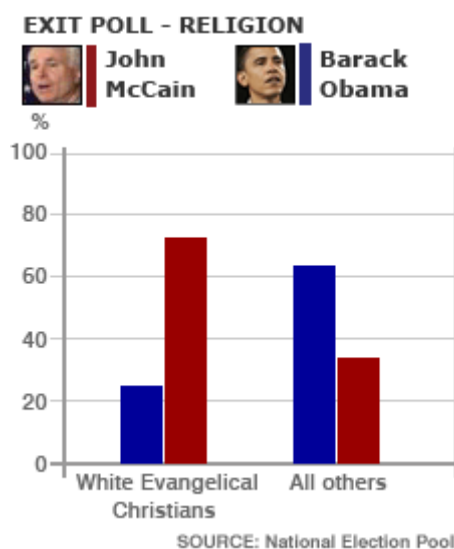
Table 8: Voter Demographics by Gender

4.4. Identification with Obama according to Religion:

Another criterion worth examining is religion. The majority of the Protestants voted for Mc Cain as visible in Table 9. Worth noting is that Protestants represent the majority of the voters (54%) as shown in Table 11. Nevertheless, Obama got only 45% of the protestant votes. This is highly significant since it means that the followers of the main religion did not vote for Obama. Catholics, however, voted for Obama with a majority of 54% to 45% for McCain according to Tables 10 and 11. Therefore, one has a reversion of the tendency. Moreover, Obama obtained a majority of votes of the disciples of all other religions: Jewish, Muslims and others. In fact, they backed Obama en masse with an overwhelming majority of 78% for the Jewish and 73% for all the other religions, which represent approximately a ratio of $\frac{3}{4}$. Last, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the atheists (i.e.: those who declare themselves without religion) supported Obama as visible in Table 10. This is not negligible since they represent 12% of the voters. As far as the religious service attendance is concerned, the more religious is the voter, the less likely he is to vote for Obama and vice versa. According to Table 10, a majority

of those who stick seriously to their religious duties and attend the religious service regularly backed Mc Cain not Obama. One may explain this by the fact that Obama himself is not highly religious. Thus, Obama got his support among the religious minorities as well as among the atheists. The dominant religion did not favor him.

Table 9: Voter Demographics by Religion



4.5. Gaining the Support of the Extremes in Terms of Education and Family Income:

Concerning education and family income, Obama got the support of the extremes. As far as the family income is concerned, the poor and the most affluent backed him. According to Table 10, 73% of the voters whose income is under 15,000 dollars, 60% of the voters whose family income is between 15,000 dollars and 30,000 dollars, 55% of those situated between 30,000 and 50,000 dollars backed Obama. For the richer sections of the society, the votes are close. There is not a great difference for the rest of the society. What is worth noting, however, is that the richest section of the society supported Obama with a majority of 52%. This is surprising since usually the more the persons are affluent, the more they tend to vote for the Republican Party.

However, they swung their vote for Obama's sake. As far as education is concerned, all the degrees of education favored Obama. As it is visible in Table 10, he obtained a majority for all the categories: not a high school graduate, high school graduate, some college education, college graduate and postgraduate education. Yet, the difference between the two candidates is striking for the two extreme categories: "not a high-school graduate" and "postgraduate education". For the former, nearly 2/3 (63%) voted for Obama; as for the highly educated, 58% gave their suffrage to Obama.

4.6. Other Factors Underlying Voting Behavior:

Briefly, for the rest of the categories, geographically, Obama's supporters tend to form a majority for all regions except the South. The latter voted primarily for McCain at the rate of 54%. In fact, only 31% of the southern Whites gave their suffrage to Obama. This is not surprising since the South tends to remain conservative and still holds strong racial prejudice. As far as the community size is concerned, one finds Obama's supporters in urban settings: almost 2/3 of the voters living in the cities as shown in Tables 10 and 11. The difference is less striking with the suburban and rural voters. The latter favored Mc Cain with a slight majority. Moreover, in terms of political party membership and political philosophy, 89% of the Liberals voted for Obama, 60% of the moderates gave their support to him too while he received only 20% of the conservative votes (Table 10). As for party identification, Obama received a majority of the independent votes. Last, concerning marital status and sexual orientation, Obama attracted primarily single voters. Indeed, approximately 2/3 of the non-married voted for him while married voters preferred McCain as visible in Table 10. Nevertheless, Obama got an overwhelming majority of the homosexual and bisexual votes: 70% even if he obtained also a slight majority among the heterosexual: 53%. Finally, First-time voters unambiguously backed Obama at the rate of 69%. As a

result, one can say that Obama's candidacy motivated many people to vote for the first time.

To recapitulate, one can say that Obama's electorate is very eclectic and includes a variety of key groups. Obama's force came from the young people, the racial and religious minorities, women, the poor and the very rich, the non-educated and highly educated, the non-married and homosexual. Thus, in examining Obama's electorate, one can notice the variety and the disparity between his voters; it shows that Obama is almost every American's president. Still, analysts expected the support of some groups for Obama like for instance the racial minorities. Nevertheless, Obama's victory was possible through the backing of groups called swing groups, i.e.: groups whose loyalty does not belong to one party or another. These swing groups make the difference between the two candidates ("Inside"). Among these groups, we have the moderates, the independents, the Catholics and the suburban voters. All of these groups rallied behind Barack Obama. In addition to that, one should note that some groups changed their voting habits for the sake of Obama's particular candidacy like for instance the well off. Thus, it is thanks to the backing of these key groups that Obama could make the difference with his adversary.

Table 10: The 2008 presidential vote by demographic subgroup

Demographic subgroup	Obama	McCain	Other	% of total vote
Total vote	53	46	1	100
Ideology				
Liberals	89	10	1	22
Moderates	60	39	1	44
Conservatives	20	78	2	34

Party

Democrats	89	10	1	39
Republicans	9	90	1	32
Independents	52	44	4	29

Gender

Men	49	48	3	47
Women	56	43	1	53

Marital status

Married	47	52	1	66
Non-married	65	33	2	34

Race

White	43	55	2	74
Black	95	4	1	13
Hispanic	67	31	2	9
Asian	62	35	3	2
Other	66	31	3	3

Religion

Protestant	45	54	1	54
Catholic	54	45	1	27
Jewish	78	21	1	2
Other	73	22	5	6
Atheist	75	23	2	12

Religious service attendance

More than weekly	43	55	2	12
Weekly	43	55	2	27
Monthly	53	46	1	15
A few times a year	59	39	2	28
Never	67	30	3	16

White evangelical or born-again Christian?

White evangelical or born-again Christian	24	74	2	26
Everyone else	62	36	2	74

Age

18–24 years old	66	32	2	10
25–29 years old	66	31	3	8

30–39 years old	54	44	2	18
40–49 years old	49	49	2	21
50–64 years old	50	49	1	27
65 and older	45	53	2	16

First time voter?

First time voter	69	30	1	11
Everyone else	50	48	2	89

Sexual orientation

Gay, lesbian, or bisexual	70	27	3	4
Heterosexual	53	45	2	96

Education

Not a high school graduate	63	35	2	4
High school graduate	52	46	2	20
Some college education	51	47	2	31
College graduate	50	48	2	28
Postgraduate education	58	40	2	17

Family income

Under \$15,000	73	25	2	6
\$15,000–\$30,000	60	37	3	12
\$30,000–\$50,000	55	43	2	19
\$50,000–\$75,000	48	49	3	21
\$75,000–\$100,000	51	48	1	15
\$100,000–\$150,000	48	51	1	14
\$150,000–\$200,000	48	50	1	6
Over \$200,000	52	46	2	6

Region

Northeast	59	40	1	21
Midwest	54	44	2	24
South	45	54	1	32
West	57	40	3	23

Community size

Urban	63	35	2	30
Suburban	50	48	2	49
Rural	45	53	2	21

Source: Exit polls conducted by Edison Research of Somerville, N.J., for the National Election Pool, a consortium of ABC News, Associated Press, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, and NBC News.

Table 11: Voter Demographics

2008	Group		Obama	McCain
All Voters		Pct.	53%	45%
SEX	Men	47	49	48
	Women	53	56	43
RACE	White	74	43	55
	African-American	13	95	4
	Hispanic	9	67	31
	Asian	2	62	35
	Other	3	66	31
AGE	18-29	18	66	32
	30-44	29	52	46
	45-64	37	50	49
	65 & over	16	45	53
INCOME	<\$15,000	6	73	25
	\$15,000-29,999	12	60	37
	\$30-49,999	19	55	43
	\$50-74,999	21	48	49
	\$75-99,999	15	51	48
	\$100,000 & over	26	49	49
UNION HOUSEHOLD	Yes	21	59	39
	No	79	51	47
REGION	East	21	59	40
	Midwest	24	54	44
	South	32	45	54

West		23	57	40
PARTY	Democrat	39	89	10
	Republican	32	9	93
	Independent	29	52	44
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY	Liberal	22	89	10
	Moderate	44	60	39
	Conservative	34	20	78
GAY/LESBIAN/BISEXUAL	Yes	4	70	27
	No	96	53	45

Notes: Survey by Edison Media Research/Mitofsky International for the National Election Pool (ABC News, Associated Press, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, NBC News). Sample of 18,018 voters consisted of 15,640 voters as they left the voting booths on Election Day November 4, 2008 and a telephone absentee/early voters survey of 2,378 respondents conducted October 24-November 2, 2008.

5. Motives Behind Voters' Support of Obama:

Motivations behind Obama's supporters are interesting. What were the reasons that motivated the electorate to vote for Obama? The results of a Pew Research survey show unexpected outcomes. The criteria that pushed Obama's electorate to vote for him are not primarily his qualities as a leader or his personal qualities. It is rather Obama's positions on important issues that pleased the electorate and were crucial for his strong support. The following comment pointed out this aspect: "Despite Obama's strong personal appeal, his supporters overwhelmingly say they favored him based on his issue positions (68%), not his leadership and personal qualities" (30%) ("Inside"). This may sound surprising since Obama is exceptional by his personality, not issue position-taking. Generally, American people praise and widely acknowledge

the value of his character. This shows, though, that Obama's ideas and way of thinking attract people. It is, according to the survey, Obama's positions on key issues that made the difference between the two candidates. Obama's ideas on the economy and health care pleased the electorate. Voters considered these issues as priorities.

According to the following passage, other criteria were decisive to Obama's victory too:

Overall, more voters said they felt Obama has the right judgment to make a good president (57%) than said the same about John McCain (49%). A 57%-majority also said Obama is in touch with people like them, while just 39% said this about McCain. Even his experience did not provide McCain a great advantage: while 59% said McCain has the right experience to be president, 51% said the same about Obama.

("Inside")

A majority of voters trust Obama's way of reasoning. Indeed, 57% think he has the right judgment. Another factor that contributes to Obama's popularity is his closeness from people. People feel close to Obama because of his efforts to keep contact with the maximum of people. Overall, in view of this study of Obama's electorate, one can conclude that Barack Obama touched a large variety of groups in the American society. His strong backing from a large array of voters denotes his overall popularity. Obama is not simply the president of the minorities. His strong appeal extends through disparate groups in the American society. After all, he got 53% of the popular votes. Thus, he got the trust of a majority of the Americans regardless of their age, race, sex, political ideology, fortune or education.

Consequently, Obama's potential for easing race relations and decreasing racial prejudice could be backed by a large array of the society who felt confident about Obama's judgment. In addition to that, Obama obtained a strong support among the minorities; Blacks, Asians, Jews, women and others largely backed him at the average rate of 2/3. A president cannot promise betterment if he does not represent the majority of the population. The examination of Obama's electorate proves his representativeness even if he did not get the support of a majority of the white voters; 43%, however, is an exceptional score for a non-white candidate. Still, the fact that a large majority of white voters voted against him, i.e.: 57%, shed light on the whites' reluctance to accept a non-white leader. This is all the more important since Whites represent 74% of the electorate. This would undoubtedly pose problems for Obama especially when he would try to propose solutions to achieve racial equality. Whites still visibly hold prejudice against a non-white person despite all the competence, intelligence and personal qualities of the candidate. Nonetheless, one might expect the candidate to make some progress on this perspective. Still, Whites' lack of support will undermine any attempt to improve race relations.

Conclusion:

As a conclusion, after assessing Barack Obama's potential for easing race relations and even reducing racial prejudice, we can without doubt conclude that he may represent the ideal candidate to decrease racism in the American society. His multiracial background, his rich experiences, his wit and vibrant sensitivity are valuable assets that place Obama as the ideal person, the person with the best potential to ease race relations and diminish or lower racial prejudice in the United States. The

fact that he is bi-racial makes him knowledgeable of both the white world and the black one. On the one hand, as he grew in Hawaii, a melting pot and a haven of tolerance, he was able to be in touch with different races and cultures. His Indonesian experience conferred on him some modesty and enabled him to be in touch with poverty and another important religion, which is Islam. Later, his experience in Chicago as a community organizer would make him aware of the problems touching the disfavored. This background and rich experiences conferred on him a unique position to understand the racial schism. On the other hand, what also increases his potential is his popularity. Obama could convince a large array of the American society. Even persons who did not vote for him acknowledge his wit and power of persuasion as well as his judgment. This trust placed upon him by a majority of the American population multiply his chances to improve race relations. Nevertheless, a black stain is that he did not get the support of the majority of the white voters. This highlights the persistence of racial prejudice, which made many Whites vote against him despite his exceptional competence and qualities.

Chapter Four:

Obama's Involvement in Reducing Racial Prejudice

Introduction:

As seen in the previous chapter, Barack Obama possesses powerful assets to improve race relations and reduce racial prejudice. His diverse identity, his intelligence, his personality, his frequent residential moves and activist career are all tools that enriched his personality and bestowed upon him some open-mindedness. This open-mindedness has given him an exceptional vision of race relations. Thus, Obama possesses a significant potential for improving the relations between the races. This chapter evaluates the evolution of racial prejudice under Obama. First, one will examine Obama's vision of race relations and then his political background as far as racial issues are concerned. Next, his actions and projects for the improvement of race relations will be given due attention. Finally, one will make a descriptive analysis of the state of race relations and racial prejudice under Obama as president.

I. Barack Obama's Vision of Race Relations:

1. Obama's Early Experience with Racism:

Before being able to tackle Barack Obama's contribution to the state of racial prejudice, it would be useful to ponder on the president's vision of race relations. First, Obama seems to hold a lucid perception of racism. This perception is not only based on his unusual background as seen earlier but also on his own experience. In his autobiography, he describes a still largely unequal American society. He relates the struggle of the disadvantaged to survive. Of significance is the description of the minorities' efforts to assimilate. Among others, we have two persons who marked his life as a community organizer in Chicago: Ruby, a young black woman and Frank, an old Black poet. Ruby one day appeared wearing blue contact lenses, which highlighted her desire to resemble white people (Obama, *Dreams* 199). In addition, Frank one day complained of pains in his feet. The reason according to him is attributed to vain efforts to put black feet into white shoes (Obama, *Dreams* 97). In fact, this vivid metaphor not only highlights the failure of the blacks to assimilate in a white society but also the after-effects of this forced integration on Blacks. The fact that the latter are not really integrated in a white dominant society leads Obama to acknowledge that there is indeed a black pathology (*Dreams* 107). Even Blacks who succeeded in their life and managed to climb the social ladder do not totally assimilate in the society. Despite their success, they remain the target of prejudice on the part of the white majority. Corroborating this reality, Frank noted, "You may be a well-trained, well-paid nigger, but you're a nigger just the same" (Obama, *Dreams* 58). Thus, studying and succeeding in one's career does not immunize the Blacks from prejudices.

Negative feelings arise from this oppression, feelings that Obama like most black people experienced in his life. In search of his identity as a black man in America, Obama noted that, "... black meant only the knowledge of your own powerlessness, of your own defeat" (*Dreams* 51). In addition, he experienced "the same doubt, the same self-contempt" (*Dreams* 52). Consequently, through his autobiography, one can note that Obama experienced the same feelings as other Afro-Americans. Nevertheless, he reveals an important fact about black people he discovered during his years at Los Angeles' Occidental College: "I had stumbled upon one of the well-kept secrets about people; that most of us weren't interested in revolt; that most of us were tired of thinking about race most of the time" (*Dreams* 58). This is a preconceived idea that white people as well as members of the other races often hold. The American society often views black people in general as angry all the time. Here, Obama attempts at modifying this vision by specifying that the issue of race does not obsess black people.

Moreover, Barack Obama acknowledges the obstacles and discrimination still confronting Blacks and other minorities based on his own experience with racism. First, while choosing a career, he was aware like most Blacks that he could not choose any career. Blacks often experience discrimination in their careers. Accordingly, he acknowledges that he had "a limited number of options at [his] disposal" (*Dreams* 48). Caught in a raising awareness of Blacks' inferiority in the American society while a teenager, he found refuge in basketball. Here, his choice was not random since generally black people excel in that sport. Obama explains the reason why that sport in particular attracted him. According to him, basketball is one of the rare fields in which Blacks are not hampered by their skin colour (*Dreams* 48). Basketball is indeed one of the rare fields in which Blacks are well seen due to their skills in that sport;

thus, blackness in basketball is more an advantage than disadvantage. This is the case for other domains like athletics and entertainment. In basketball, he felt some ease and managed somehow to boost his self-image. Nevertheless, he realized that even in basketball, one could not escape the reality of racism. For instance, he overheard the assistant of his coach refer to the other team as a “bunch of niggers” (*Dreams* 49). This episode deeply touched him since he realized that in fact racism was everywhere and unavoidable. White domination was present even in a majoritarily black sport like basketball. Ray, a friend of Obama, summed up the pervasive white domination and Blacks’ powerlessness: “We were playing on the white man’s court; by the white man’s rules... because he had power and you didn’t” (Obama, *Dreams* 51).

The persistent racial discrimination against African-Americans is scarcely but pertinently tackled in his speeches thereby stressing the fact that it is a reality that no American should ignore. Accordingly, the Trayvon Martin case was a good opportunity for the president to remind the Americans of such reality. Accordingly, Obama described the African-Americans’ experience with discrimination in a press conference 19 July 2013:

There are very few African American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me. There are very few African American men who haven't had the experience of walking across the street and hearing the locks click on the doors of cars. That happens to me -- at least before I was a senator. There are very few African Americans who haven't had the experience of getting on an elevator and a woman clutching her purse nervously and holding her breath

until she had a chance to get off. That happens often. (“Remarks on Trayvon”)

What makes this description even more powerful is the president’s inclusion of his own experience. As a result, this personalization of experiences of discrimination strengthens this description since Obama himself has lived such bias. Generally, white people believe that discrimination touches only delinquent Blacks; but the case of Obama proves that educated, well-presented Blacks are also victims of such bias. Relevant to Trayvon Martin’s case is bias in the judicial system mentioned by the President. He states, “The African American community is also knowledgeable that there is a history of racial disparities in the application of our criminal laws -- everything from the death penalty to enforcement of our drug laws (“Remarks on Trayvon”). Criminal justice is indeed one of the most discriminatory sectors. Numerous sources largely document this discrimination, and they denote a patent reality; his remarks mention that blatant reality. Nevertheless, as other forms of discrimination, it is most of the time denied by the majority of the white population. Thus, Obama took the occasion of Trayvon Martin’s case to remind the Americans of such reality.

2. Describing Inter-Minority and Anti-White Prejudice: a Commonly Ignored and Underestimated Phenomenon

Far from focusing on black-white relations, Obama portrays other facets of racism. In his autobiography notably, he refers to racial prejudice against other minorities such as Arabs and Latinos and, unexpectedly, he tackles reverse racism. First, Obama describes a scene in which some individuals denigrated Arabs but not by white individuals as one might expect but by black ones. The expression “sitting on a

carpet with a bunch of Arabs” is used in a conversation around Malcolm X (Obama, *Dreams* 52). This is an interesting example of what we call inter-minority prejudice. The latter is a phenomenon seldom referred to but as significant as white racism. Second, in *Dreams from my Father*, Obama describes another example of inter-minority racial prejudice: racial prejudice between Blacks and Latinos respectively referred to as “niggers” and “kikes” which are pejorative appellations:

I had grown accustomed, everywhere, to suspicion between the races. But whether because of New York’s density or because of its scale, it was only now that I began to grasp the almost mathematical precision with which America’s race and class problems joined; the depth, the ferocity, of resulting tribal wars; the bile that flowed freely not just out on the streets but in the stalls of Columbia’s bathrooms as well, where, no matter how many times the administration tried to paint them over, the walls remained scratched with blunt correspondence between niggers and kikes. (*Dreams* 70)

What is worth noting is that he even mentions reverse racism. The latter is literally racism against Whites. Nevertheless, this is a controversial term since for many, it is impossible for minorities to be racist since lacking the power to subjugate Whites. Still, reverse racism is a phenomenon that sociologists are increasingly discussing. Obama refers to this phenomenon in his autobiography. He relates that when Chicago black mayor hired some black people in his staff, white people referred to it as reverse racism (*Dreams* 82). This comes from the fact that when black individuals start to get important posts, white individuals cannot accept this reality and outcries of reverse racism come to emanate. Thus, Obama discussed all the facets of racism hereby giving a full picture of this phenomenon. His lucidity is pervasive all throughout his

writings since on the one hand, he does not concentrate on white racism only, and on the other hand, while discussing the persisting inequality, he does not put all the blame on the white majority but claims that the minorities (especially the black one) bear some responsibility. During his life, Obama did fully grasp the full extent of black oppression in the United States. Still, his optimistic nature refused the all-black image that his black friends provided of race relations as visible throughout his autobiography.

Nevertheless, even if deeply marked by experiences of racism, he does not deny the improvement in race relations. He especially acknowledges the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, which according to him, was crucial in improving the lot of the minorities and in enabling the American society to take a less unequalitarian direction. Accordingly, as far as the existence of a change is concerned, he stated that, “I have felt it as surely as one feels a change in the temperature. When I hear some in the Black community deny those changes I think it not only dishonors those who struggled in our behalf....” (Obama, *Audacity* 138). He further confirms that it is partly thanks to the actors of the movement that his election became possible. He asserted in his autobiography that: “the success of the Civil Rights Movement had at least created some overlap between communities, more room to maneuver for people like me” (Obama, *Dreams* 152).

In fact, the movement has opened new doors for minorities especially Blacks who started to get access to some education and to embrace careers that were impossible in the past; it enabled Blacks to get higher posts. Obama is with some others the fruit of this struggle. He acknowledged the role of the civil rights activists. Indeed, historically speaking, one cannot deny the progress generated by the Civil Rights Movement. Not only did it enable to outlaw racial discrimination thereby

opening new opportunities for the minorities but also and most notably, it enhanced the minorities' self-esteem in addition to creating a certain inter-minority solidarity. It also not negligibly enabled the Whites to know better the different minorities and for some to change their perception of the others (Ogbu 16).

Thus, without denying the extent of the advances gained thanks to the Civil Rights Movement, Obama asserts that the improvements are not satisfactory and additional changes are required: "but as much as I insist that things have gone better, I am mindful of this truth as well, better isn't good enough" (Obama, *Audacity* 138). He reclaimed later the same idea in the Selma Voting Rights March commemoration in Selma, Alabama 4 March 2007:

I'm here because somebody marched. I'm here because you all sacrificed for me. I stand on the shoulders of giants. I think the Moses generation, but we've got to remember how Joshua still had a job to do.
 ("Remarks at Selma")

The repetition of the same idea highlights the fact that Obama has been very careful not to alienate the civil rights' veterans, as he calls them, by denying their achievements.

3. Obama's Description of Present-Day Race Relations: Debunking the Myth of Post-Racialism:

Obama thinks that though changes are undeniable, further advances are required to move towards a more equalitarian society. Nowadays numerous are those who believe that the United States has entered a post-racial era and that racism belongs to the past. Obama, however, does not believe so and holds a more realistic

view. Throughout his speeches, he often emphasizes the unity of the American society despite its diversity. On the announcement of his candidacy for the American presidency, he stated, “That beneath all the differences of race and region, faith and station, we are one people” (qtd. in Dupuis and Boeckelman 138). In fact, here he affirms his personal belief in one of the creeds of the United States, which is “a Pluribus Unum” which means “out of many, one”. In other words, the American identity is indissociable of its diversity. In the 2004 Democratic Convention, he reasserted this belief:

There is not a Black America and a white America and a Latino America and Asian-America_ there’s the USA. In a sense I have no choice but to believe in this vision of America. 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, *Audacity* 137)

It is important for Obama to assert explicitly this conviction since some critics doubted his loyalty. For some people, Obama would represent and defend solely African-Americans. He constantly repeats that he is part of the American society with all its diversity. He does not represent a single group.

Nevertheless, he stresses the distinction between believing in post-racialism and believing in the unity of the American society. He does not believe in post-racial America rejecting this theory; he denotes explicitly: “to say that we are one people is different from saying that race does no longer matter” (Obama, *Audacity* 137). For him, the struggle against racism is not yet over. In the same Convention, he also stated:

To say that we are one people is not to suggest that race no longer matters-that the fight for equality has been won; or that the problems that minorities face in this country today are largely self-inflicted. (qtd. in Hill 53)

Thus, Obama expresses explicitly that the United States has not achieved the ideal of equality yet. The use of the term “self-inflicted” is judicial since he rejects hereby one of the beliefs held by some members of the white majority: that the minorities nowadays have all the tools and means possible to reach the American dream and if they fail to do so, they are the only ones to blame. Here, he stresses that there are undeniably external factors that play a significant role in the problems encountered by the minorities. For him, race is still an important issue in the United States, and to belittle its continuing significance may have serious consequences such as perpetuating racial inequality (Dupuis and Boeckelman 87). Indeed, denying the continuing existence of a problem and ignoring it would lead the society to take for granted the elimination of the problem, and it would provide no solutions. As a consequence, the problem would perpetuate.

Accordingly, though admitting the progress done in confronting racial prejudice in nowadays-American society, he warns against a subsequent dismissal of the problem. In *The Audacity of Hope*, he asserts, “I maintain, however, that in today’s America such prejudices are far more loosely held than they once were and hence are subjective to refutation” (140). He means that because racial prejudice has declined, it has become less visible thereby being easier to refute. Its continuance is subject to rejection on the part of the people. He continues on the same idea:

This isn't to say that prejudice has vanished. None of us_ blacks, whites, Latinos and Asians_ is immune to the stereotypes that our culture continues to feed us. (139)

Thus, despite the evident decline of racism and racial prejudice, Obama repeats on several occasions that the American society has not eradicated racial prejudice yet, contrary to the widespread belief in the color-blindness of the American society.

While Senator, he reiterated the same idea in a famous show, *Larry King Live*, on 19 October 2006: “we have to acknowledge the progress we made, but understand that we still have a long way to go. That things are better, but still not good enough.” His repetition of his position makes it even clearer. He stands against the majority's conviction of the color-blindness of the American society

Moreover, according to him, one should not give way to surveys to assess the extent of the persisting prejudice because of their well-known unreliability. He asserts accordingly that, “Surveys of racial attitudes are notoriously unreliable” (Obama, *Audacity* 140). Consequently, one should not rely on surveys to measure the extent of racial prejudice because they do not give a faithful account of the persisting racial prejudice. As quoted earlier, Obama points out an important reality that is often ignored or denied; that racial prejudice is not the exclusivity of the white majority, even minorities often hold prejudice. He states, “None of us — black, white, Latino and Asian — is immune to the stereotypes that our culture continues to feed us” (Obama, *Audacity* 235). This remark is quite significant. He states that anyone is likely to hold prejudices. That is an uncommon attitude among Black leaders: to acknowledge that anyone in society, whatever his/her race, may be guilty of prejudice. This is a highly important precision since it denotes the objectivity of Obama. Black leaders or even Whites lack the objectivity always pointing at and accusing the other.

For Black leaders, only Whites are prejudiced. Thus, Obama shows his wisdom in portraying the reality as it is: that anyone may be prejudiced. He stresses the influence of one's culture in adopting stereotypes. He rejects clearly the myth of post-racial America denouncing it as a threat to the still ongoing struggle against racism.

Likewise, Obama displays some lucidity in describing the complexity of the problem of inequality that persists in the American society. For him, the inequality is not only racial. In his different speeches or writings appears his consciousness that the problems of race and class are linked. He stated that, "it was only now that I began to grasp the almost mathematical precision with which America's race and class problems joined" (*Dreams* 70). Indeed, in the United States, not only is there a racial divide but also a class divide.

4. Obama's Suggestions for the Persisting Racial Divide:

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Obama strives to unite the different racial groups of the society by stressing their common American identity. Being American means being committed to common ideals and values such as liberty and equality. He asserts, "[w]e have shared values, values that aren't black, white or Hispanic; values that are American and democratic" (qtd. in Dupuis and Boeckelman 82). Here, he wants to stress that the common American identity is more important than racial appurtenance. According to him, one should not focus on the racial belonging of individual Americans.

In addition, Obama appeals to more understanding between the different races. Each one should try to understand the feelings of the others and not condemn them without prior consideration. He himself applies this recommendation. In his speeches, especially during his presidential campaign, he tries to acknowledge the legitimacy of

the feelings of both the white community and the black one thereby alienating none.

For Obama, both black anger and white resentment are legitimate:

The anger [of African-Americans] is real; it is powerful; and to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots, only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding between the races... To wish away the resentments of white America, to label them as misguided or even racist, without recognizing they are grounded on legitimate concerns_ this too widens the racial divide, and blocks the path to understanding. (qtd. in Bascom 685)

Obama's message here is powerful and particularly witty. Indeed, he legitimizes the right of Blacks to feel angry as well as the right of Whites to feel resentful. That is an attitude that white politicians as well as black ones seldom hold. He is somehow trying to make a bridge between the black and white communities in order to reconcile them. For him, each race should strive to understand the origins of the feelings of the other races. Each race should at least neither deny the existence of those feelings nor ignore them. According to him, the denial or ignorance of black anger and white resentment would only widen the gap between the different races and would infringe any potential improvement in race relations in general. Black anger originates from centuries of subordination and denial of opportunities and rights. The injustices that Black people underwent and are still undergoing are a reality. Obama acknowledges this fact. According to Pedersen: "[h]e acknowledged the legacy of slavery and racial injustice that still affected African-Americans while arguing that blaming it alone would stifle any chance for change" (49). Thus, for Obama even if the injustice is real, one should not focus only on it to explain the persisting inequalities. It is not the sole cause of nowadays' racial inequality, and accusing it as

the only reason of the subordination would infringe or hinder any improvement of the situation of the black community. The Afro-Americans have some responsibility for improving their conditions.

Moreover, anger is not a feeling exclusively felt by the black community; for Obama, some members of the white community experience the same sentiment. In his famous speech “A More Perfect Union” delivered on 18 March 2008, Obama refers to white anger; he states, “In fact a similar anger exists within segments of the white community; most working and middle class white Americans don’t feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race” (“A More Perfect Union” 68). This remark comes from his own experience as a community organizer in Chicago. In his autobiography, he relates stories of white people living in destitution. Their lot resembles that of the disadvantaged minorities. As a result, these people may also feel angry against their country’s inaptitude to offer them the promised American dream or at least to give them a minimum of opportunity. Thus, considering the feelings of both the white and the black communities may be a first step towards better understanding between the races. Obama himself gives the example; he succeeded in gaining both the Black support overwhelmingly and a large pan of the white vote. He managed to achieve such an exploit by intelligently avoiding the alienation of any group. As a bi-racial, he is in a particularly good position to understand the feelings of both the black and the white communities.

Barack Obama is, nevertheless, not so naïve as to imagine ideal relations between the races. He is conscious that the relations may never be perfect. He states in his autobiography that:

The emotions between the races could never be pure; even love was tarnished by the desire to find in the other some element that was missing in ourselves. Whether we sought out our demons or salvation, the other race would always remain just that: menacing, alien, and apart. (72)

In a sense, the relations between the races can never be quite natural; there would always be a minimum of distance between people of different races. According to Obama, however, members of each race should strive to reduce the gap between themselves and the others.

Thus, at this stage, a synthesis of Obama's suggestions to improve race relations may prove useful. Primarily, Obama appeals to the Americans, especially to Whites, to acknowledge and not to deny the continuing existence of racism. The myth of post-racialism or color-blindness should be rejected first because it does not reflect the reality, a reality that is still tinged with racism and second because it inhibits the problem and does not make it disappear. Secondly, American people need to grasp the true nature and complexity of the phenomenon and how it is narrowly intermingled with the problem of class. Thirdly, Obama suggests an increasing understanding between the different races by considering and taking into account the feelings of each community, feelings that are genuine. Finally yet importantly, by reminding them of their common American identity, the American president calls all the races to unite and fight racism and the persisting inequalities in a common front. Therefore, the exceptionality of Obama in terms of mixed parentage and background confers on him a particular vision of race relations and of the ways to improve them. Nevertheless, these are suggestions that are very difficult to put into practice due to the reluctance of

all the races in general and the white race in particular to make such great efforts towards a truly equalitarian society and to lose its supremacy and privileges.

Consequently, at the time of his first candidacy, Obama has a mitigated view of race relations. For him, progress is real, but the elimination of racial prejudice requires some additional efforts. He warns against the illusion of color-blindness, which has the dangerous effect of ignoring the continuing existence of racism and racial inequality. He noted about the state of race relations and his potential role in improving them:

This is where we are right now. It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years. I have never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy. (*In his Own Words* 69)

Therefore, Barack Obama held a realistic view and acknowledged from the onset that his presidency would not eliminate the racial problem.

5. Obama's Predispositions for Reducing Racial Prejudice:

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the subject of race has rarely been at the heart of discussions during his first campaign. Indeed, Obama did not refer to it only if addressed on the issue directly. The important question would be: is race really a secondary issue or is it significant for him? Is his reluctance in addressing the issue a carefulness not to alienate voters especially white ones or is race not a priority for him? If one examines Obama's attitude during his first presidential campaign, one can denote a rarity of reference to the topic of race. Analysts have interpreted these silences differently. On the one hand, some analysts viewed them as a sign that

Obama was endorsing America's claim of color-blindness. One of his biographers Johnny Bernard Hill confirms this accusation: "Unfortunately, some have interpreted Obama's silence around explicit conversations regarding race as an opportunity to introduce (and advance) notions of movement towards a "post-racial" society" (43). On the other hand, others have denounced that it was a political maneuver; a strategy to win a maximum of voters since the American population generally prefers to avoid the topic. Accordingly, Hill reports: "some claim this was a calculated political move necessary to try to win over an American population that was racially insensitive and fearful of discussing the issue" (43). One can notice that, indeed, the American people dislike discussing the issue and this for two reasons; for some, race is not important at all and for others it is out of fear that they prefer avoiding the issue. Simply in all cases, discussions about race generally highlight the imperfections and contradictions of the American society. This is why race is always a highly sensitive issue. Nevertheless, does this reluctance to refer to race translate a non-importance in Obama's eyes? For Hill, the fact that he rarely mentions the issue does not mean a neglect of the matter; this does not mean that race is unimportant to him:

Except for the Philadelphia speech [...], Obama has spoken very little explicitly about race during his campaign or as president. That does not mean that the subject of race was and is not important to Obama. (43)

Thus, the silence may not reflect an ignorance or neglect of the issue. Race may be important to Obama.

At first glance, his silence on race may be misleading. It seems that Obama does not really care about the issue. Thus, one needs to examine more deeply his real views and intentions. After having reviewed his background, one may turn to examine

his deeds as far as race is concerned. First, his previous career as a civil rights attorney and community activist provides a good insight on the importance of race for Obama. Indeed, he worked to improve the lot of the disadvantaged in South Side, a poor district of Chicago. As any other American ghetto, mainly racial minorities especially African-Americans and Hispanics inhabit South Side. These minorities live on the margin of the society. Second, a brief overview of his achievements as a senator may give a glimpse at his concern for race. When examining his achievements as a senator for the state of Illinois, it seems that he did not focus on racial issues. Dupuis and Boeckelman, his biographers noticed:

During his first two years in the senate, Obama did not generally emphasize racial issues. He also has not played a leading role in the congressional black caucus. It appears that he does not want to be seen as the leader of Black America. (88)

This may be true. Still, it seems that Obama has a less overt method to fight racial inequality and injustice as well as improving the living conditions of the minorities. He prefers to cover racial issues by including them in larger contexts. The same biographers highlight this approach, “[h]e approached the issues of race by putting them in context of broader themes: jobs, education and health care” (Dupuis and Boeckelman 85). Thus, without openly fighting racial inequality and injustice, Obama sought to alleviate the issues that touch the minorities the most. Employment, education and health care are the sectors in which there persists a substantial degree of racial discrimination. Housing is also part of this black list of sectors in which racism is still pervasive. In these highly important sectors, minorities still suffer from racial discrimination. As a result, Obama’s intention is to fight inequality in general without

explicitly targeting racial inequality. Nevertheless, because inequality is mainly racial in these sectors, it becomes an indirect but effective way to target racism.

It would be important to note that while a senator, he applied this strategy. He initiated bills to reform the electoral system, health care, education. For instance, on 1 March 2007, he proposed a bill entitled “a bill to amend the Help America Vote Act of 2002 in order to measure, compare, and improve the quality of voter access to polls and voter services in the administration of Federal elections in the states” (Obama, *In His Own Words* 148). This bill intended to protect the voter in the exercise of his duty. Even if it targeted all the voters, the minorities are the ones who suffer most in the voting process. Racial discrimination still hinders the due electoral process. Likewise, Obama initiated a bill entitled: “a bill to prohibit deceptive practices in Federal elections.” This bill turned out to be a law and became the Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act of 2007 (Obama, *What he Believes in* 108+). Minority members especially Blacks were and are still subject to denial of their voting rights through deception or intimidation or threats.

Health care is another domain in which racial inequality is visible due to a persistent racial discrimination in this domain. While a senator, Obama proposed several bills (US Senate Bills 976, 1067 and 1068 notably) in order to improve the access to health care for all Americans regardless of their class or race (*In his Own Words* 198, 217, 227). Moreover, through the US Senate Bill 1513 entitled: “a bill to authorize grant programs to enhance the access of low-income African- American students to higher education” introduced in May 2007, Obama wished to prevent poverty to be a barrier to higher education for skilled young Black students (*What he Believes in* 308). Indeed, in the United States colleges conditioned their entrance by the ability to pay extremely expensive fees, which prevents many low income

Americans from benefiting from this education. Since the problems of class and race join in the American case, the low-income Americans prove to belong disproportionately to the racial minorities. Thus, education becomes a privilege for some; not a right for all.

Finally, he also initiated a bill to protect minority teenagers from the usual plagues. Accordingly, the bill number 1790 introduced on 16 July 2007 entitled “a bill to make grants to carry out activities to prevent the incidence of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections among teens in racial and ethnic minorities or immigrant communities.” (Obama, *What he Believes in* 326). To sum up, one can note that through broader themes, he targeted in fact the hurdles that minorities confront. Therefore, he sought to alleviate the discrimination against racial minorities through attacking the most important fields such as education, voting rights and health care. This enabled him to avoid his categorization as racial senator; thereby being more effective.

6. Obama’s Plan for Race Relations:

Next, it would be judicial to peer into Barack Obama’s intentions as president. Did he adopt the same strategy? Was the struggle against racism one of his priorities? As seen earlier, during his campaign, he seldom spoke about race. Examining his program would help us determine which room is devoted to the struggle against racism. In broad lines, three sectors seem to be Obama’s priority: education, health care and civil rights. Not surprisingly, the president targeted these sectors because racial discrimination is still pervasive and racial inequality is most blatant in these fields in particular. In his booklet *Blueprint for Change*, Barack Obama provided his plan for America. In the field of civil rights, he intended to:

Strengthen civil rights enforcement, combat employment discrimination, expand hate crimes statutes, end deceptive voting practices, end racial profiling, reduce crime recidivism by providing ex-offender support, eliminating sentencing disparities, expand use of drug courts. (*Obama, Blueprint 49*)

When examined broadly, none of these aims refers explicitly to racism except for “racial profiling”. Nevertheless, all are linked to racial discrimination and are plagues that continue to touch the racial minorities. Therefore, eradicating racial discrimination is clearly part of Obama’s program. Visibly, Obama intends to reduce the remaining racial disparities and injustices for the American society to become more equalitarian.

II. Obama’s Efforts to Improve Race Relations and Decrease Racial

Prejudice:

1. Through his Speeches:

Undeniably, Barack Obama made some efforts to improve race relations. First, he championed the unity of all Americans, ameliorated the image of the minorities in the eyes of the white majority, and raised the self-esteem of the minority members through trying to improve their conditions. Indeed, through his numerous speeches, one can notice that he preached and reemphasized the unity between all Americans. During his campaign as well as during his presidency, he has repeatedly reasserted that Americans form one people despite their diversity. Right at the beginning of his presidency in January 2009, he reaffirmed in his Inaugural Address that:

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve. (*Inaugural Address*)

This passage contains several strong messages. To begin with, he insisted that Americans should view their unprecedented diversity as an advantage not a drawback. They should consider it as a force not as a shortcoming. This message is effective since people see diversity, highlighted by the metaphor “patchwork”, as a dividing factor. Therefore, he appeals to the Americans to see their diversity as a force. Second, of particular significance he mentioned the religious diversity of the American society. He cites the main faiths composing the American society without forgetting the atheists. Here, in this address, he intelligently put Christians and Muslims together in the same phrase. This choice was surely not random when we consider the current context. Indeed since 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror, there has been strong anti-Muslim sentiment. This does not mean that racial prejudice and discrimination towards the Arabs and the Muslims did not exist before; they existed, but they exploded after the attacks of 9/11. Consequently, in this climate of hostility, the president purposefully joined the words Christians and Muslims in the same phrase; this collocation is loaded with intense meaning. It seems as a message of reconciliation. He wanted to make Christians understand that they and Muslims are part of the same society and as such, there should be no hostility towards the other

religious groups. The deliberate association of Christians with Muslims demonstrates Obama's praiseworthy intention, while the usual associations that we find commonly are "Christians and Jews," "Muslims and Hindus."

Third, the newly-elected president reemphasizes the contribution of all immigrants to the American culture hereby denying the common belief held among the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants that they alone shaped American culture. This multiple contribution is also present in the expression "patchwork heritage." Fourth, the allusion to the Americans' common history and past further illustrates the president's unifying intentions. Here again, his choice to mention "dark" periods of their past is not random. Indeed, he stressed the fact that hard times test the solidity of a union, rather than happy episodes. Obama wants to stress that despite the difficulty of those moments, America's union resisted and survived. Finally, he finishes this passage by stating that the Americans have the capacity to overcome racial and religious hostilities just as they were able to come through other hard moments in their history (*Obama, Inaugural Address*). To sum up, Barack Obama uses his powerful eloquence to convey a strong message of unification between all Americans.

Furthermore, reasserting the importance of the Americans' sense of unity, he repeatedly asserted this aspect through his other speeches. For instance, in his victory speech on 6 November 2012, he took the opportunity to highlight this unity: "the belief that while each of us will pursue our own individual dreams, we are an American family, and we rise or fall together, as one nation, and as one people" (*Obama, Remarks of the President on Election Night*). This unity is embodied here in a common destiny. Americans share the good moments but also the bad ones together. The president regularly holds this discourse. Accordingly, eight years after his election, he keeps on reasserting this unity. He reasserted such message especially

after the recent divisive events. Indeed, incidents of white police officers shooting young black teenagers multiplied. Lately, black individuals killed five white police officers in Dallas. In reaction to these events that fuelled racial hatred and suspicions, Obama recalled the American society not to give up to antagonism and division. He said:

I understand. I understand how Americans are feeling. But Dallas, I'm here to say we must reject such despair. I'm here to insist that we are not as divided as we seem. And I know that because I know America. I know how far we've come against impossible odds. (Obama, Dallas Memorial Speech)

He further encourages American people to see themselves as one people. He continues, "I see what's possible when we recognize that we are one American family, all deserving of equal treatment. All deserving equal respect. All children of God. That's the America I know" (Dallas Memorial Speech). Here, he wanted to make the Americans view their unity as a force that would overcome racial hatred.

2. Through his Actions/Policies:

2.1. Considering the Executive Orders:

Barack Obama intended to improve race relations through issuing executive orders. Executive orders represent the president's initiatives by excellence. Accordingly, he issued some executive orders that concerned racial minorities; he did not intend these decisions to address the race problem and racial prejudice directly but to enhance the rights of the concerned racial minorities. One should emphasize that President Obama did not neglect any of the main American racial minorities.

Presidential Executive Order 13515 issued on October, 14th, 2009 concerned the Asian American and Pacific Islander community (Government Publishing Office 261). Its aim was “increasing participation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in federal programs” (GPO 261). In this executive order, the president not only acknowledges the priceless contributions of this community to the nation but also acknowledges that many challenges still face this minority. That is why he decided to create a commission to boost this community’s participation in federal programs. This gesture on his part is all the more significant since Asian-Americans are often collectively labeled as a “model” minority performing even better than the white majority itself in terms of educational achievement and average income. Nevertheless, this general trend neglects disparities within this community with Southeastern Asians performing worse than the average (US Census Bureau). This helps highlight his awareness of the difficulties that this often-neglected community still confronts.

Next, through several other executive orders, President Obama attempted to improve the educational attainment of the two major racial minorities namely the African-Americans and the Hispanics. On 26 February 2010, President Obama initiated Executive Order 13532 that concerned the historically black colleges and universities. The aim of this order as mentioned is, “promoting excellence, innovation, and sustainability at historically black colleges and universities” (Gvt Publishing Office 193). He justifies this help by stressing the contributions of the nation’s 105 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which constitute a source of leaders in many fields. Accordingly, President Obama wrote:

These institutions continue to be important engines of economic growth and community service, and they are proven ladders of intergenerational advancement for men and women of all ethnic, racial,

and economic backgrounds, especially African Americans. (qtd. in Brook and Starks 285)

For him, it is the people's duty to promote these institutions since they represent a springboard for American young talents, especially among the minority community. In addition, still with the same aim of promoting minority education, the president signed two other orders. The first one Executive Order 13555 entitled "White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics" was signed on 19 October 2010. Another order that concerned the Indian American minority followed: Executive Order 13592 entitled "Improving American Indian and Alaska Natives Educational Opportunities and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities" (Government Publishing Office 290). The last community to benefit from an executive order aimed at improving its educational outcomes was the African-American one through the Executive Order entitled "White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African-Americans" which was signed on 26 July 2012. The aim of this order is proclaimed as such:

To restore the country to its role as global leader in education, to strengthen the nation by improving educational outcomes for African-Americans for all ages, and to help ensure that all African-Americans receive an education that properly prepares them for college, productive careers, and satisfying lives. (284)

Thus, in a series of executive orders, President Obama sought to improve the educational attainment of the different racial minorities by helping them to receive an adequate education. This gesture on his part is all the more significant since the right to a good education is the basis for success in life. Education opens numerous

opportunities for young people in general and for minority youth in particular. Receiving a good education would enable young minority members to have a chance to get a good position in society. This would improve the opinion of the rest of the society towards them, especially that of the white majority. In turn, this would reduce racial prejudice and improve race relations in general. Therefore, improving the educational achievement of the Blacks, Hispanics and Indians may prove a good way to reduce racial prejudice of which dark races are still victims.

In addition, trying to provide the minorities with opportunities in education may not be sufficient to enable them get jobs according to their capacities; this is why President Obama decided to introduce an executive order that concerned the world of work. Executive Order 13583 was entitled “Establishing a Coordinated Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusiveness in the Federal Workforce” and was signed on 18 August 2011 (Government Publishing Office 266). Through this order, the president sought to diversify the federal workforce.

2.2. Considering Congressional Legislation:

2.2.1. The Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act:

To begin with, Barack Obama made efforts to strengthen anti-discriminatory laws for women. Despite all the progresses that the position of women underwent especially during the twentieth century, that section of the population still suffers from more or less overt discriminatory practices. The world of work is one of the sectors in which gender discrimination is still not only frequent but also alarming by its extent. Being aware of the hindrances from which women are victims, Barack Obama approved legislation combating salary disparities between the genders. He signed the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act on 29 January 2009. Americans

celebrated this act as a huge victory for women. Concretely, this law “empowers women to recover wages lost to discrimination by extending the time period an employee can file a claim”. In addition, President Obama summoned a National Equal Pay Task Force to ensure that existing equal pay laws are fully enforced. In other words, he wanted to make sure equal pay laws were being respected and that women were being paid equally to men. One should note here that these initiatives concern women in general but they undeniably serve racial minority women more since the latter are victims of double discrimination due to both their gender and race. African-American women are indeed at the bottom of the revenue scale (US Census Bureau). Thus by benefiting women in general, these initiatives touched racial minority women in particular since they are the ones who suffer most from discrimination. The President stresses the importance of this piece of legislation in the following speech:

So signing this bill today is to send a clear message that making our economy work means making sure it works for everybody, that there are no second-class citizens in our workplaces, and that it’s not just unfair and illegal, it’s bad for businesses to pay somebody less because of their gender or their age or their race or their ethnicity, religion or disability. (Remarks by the President upon Signing the Lily Ledbetter Bill)

Therefore, President Obama took this opportunity to send a vital message to reassert his goal of fighting discrimination and making the society more equal especially in the field of employment in which all forms of discrimination are still latent. Thus, this law should be seen in the larger perspective of fighting discrimination in general and not only sexism. In the passage cited above, Obama revealed this intention through

his reference to the other types of discriminations, “because of their gender or their age or their race or their ethnicity, religion or disability.”

2.2.2. Supporting the Fair Sentencing Act:

Next, President Obama strove to restrict racial discrimination in another sector in which it is a current practice: criminal justice. This is again through supporting a piece of legislation that does not target racial minorities explicitly. In an effort to make the American judicial system fairer and less discriminatory, Obama initiated, or at least supported, the passing of several pieces of legislation. The Fair Sentencing Act enacted on 3 August 2010 is one illustration of the overall presidential struggle to reform criminal justice. Indeed, this sector is one of the domains in which racial discrimination is the most pervasive and blatant. As stressed earlier in this work, members of racial minorities especially African-Americans tend to be overrepresented in penal justice. Besides, they tend to be arrested and convicted disproportionately and they are subject to longer sentences than Whites for the same offence. Already in 1986, Congress voted the Anti-Drug Abuse Act in which a disparity of sentences existed between the holders of crack cocaine and powder cocaine. Two problems arose with this act: First, such a disparity has no logic; second, it led to be claimed as racially-biased since African-Americans were more likely to possess crack cocaine and as such be convicted for more severe penalties as explained in the following passage:

In 2010, Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act (FSA), which reduced the sentencing disparity between offenses for crack and powder cocaine from 100:1 to 18:1. The scientifically unjustifiable 100:1 ratio meant that people faced longer sentences for offenses

involving crack cocaine than for offense involving the same amount of powder cocaine- two forms of the same drug. Most disturbingly, because the majority of people arrested for crack offenses are African American, the 100:1 ratio resulted in vast racial disparities in the average length of sentences for comparable offenses. (American Civil Liberties Union)

Thus, though not explicitly stating it, this piece of legislation aimed at redressing the existing disparity between offenders of different races. As such, one could consider this as an additional effort on the part of the American president to fight the persisting racial discrimination in criminal justice. In the official White House website dedicated to the justice system, the President is presented as “leading the fight to build a fairer and more equitable criminal justice system” (white House).

2.2.3. Pushing Forward the Patient Protection and Affordable Care

Act:

Furthermore, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act embodies another indirect effort provided by President Obama to improve minorities’ conditions. Congress voted it on 23 March 2010. This act targeted Americans in general but touched mostly the different minorities. The aim of this piece of legislation is presented as providing Americans with “stronger rights and protections, better access to care, more affordable coverage and stronger Medicare” (White House). This piece of legislation is in some way revolutionary in a nation in which health coverage is not a field traditionally tackled by the government. Faithful to the individualist character of the American society, each American has to rely on himself and not on the government for anything like finding jobs, shelter and health care as well. To

summarize the situation, if one could pay for a health insurance, it would cover him/her, otherwise not. Thus, many people could not afford medical care and find themselves indebted in case of emergency. It happened sometimes that some people died out of absence or lack of inadequate medical care. Providing health care for the population was an unpopular issue for the government because it was contrary to the American creed. Even if often pointed out by politicians, none before Obama had been able to succeed in reforming this field, so great were the obstacles. As a result, it had been a long and painful struggle before this reform came. The motivation of Obama lies in these words stated by himself:

The stories of everyday Americans and, more importantly, the coverage it took to share those stories is what kept this effort alive and moving forward even when it looked like it was lost. They are why we got this done. They are why I signed this bill into law. (Remarks on the Affordable Care Act)

This act has been even more resisted because many denounced it as being a racial policy in a hidden manner. This policy is, according to many, targeting the racial minorities. As such, it is going to divide the population along racial lines. Michael Tesler held that opinion. In an article entitled: "The Spillover of Racialization into Health Care: How President Obama Polarized Public Opinion by Racial Attitudes and Race," he argues that: "President's Obama's strong association with an issue like health care should polarize public opinion by racial attitudes and race" (690). The president's strong support may make the people point out at the contradiction between his assertion as the president of all Americans and his backing of a policy with strong racial overtones. The president personally dismissed such accusations. He asserted in a press conference in September 2009: "What I'm saying is this debate that's taking

place [over health care reform] is not about race, it's about people being worried about how our government should operate (qtd. in Tesler 690).” Therefore, for the President, this reform concerns the prerogatives of the American government. It should not be seen as a purely racial issue.

Without targeting the racial minorities explicitly, “Obamacare” as it came to be popularly known, touches principally this section of the population. Indeed, they are the ones that suffer disproportionately from insufficient or inadequate health care. The logic is simple: the section of the population who could not afford coverage proves to be disproportionately composed of racial minorities. Among them of course stands the African-American community. As stated by Thomas Duncan in the *International Business Times*, “Obamacare will provide coverage to the 32 million African-Americans who are not currently covered (Duncan).” Thus through this act, Obama sought to repair a latent injustice of the American system: the inequality in health care, which is dramatic. It benefited the lower sections of the American society in which we find disproportionate numbers of racial minorities’ individuals, principally Blacks and Hispanics. As journalists Kevin Qualey and Margot Sanger-Katz stated in a *New York Times* article: “the biggest winners from the law include people between the ages of 18 and 34, Blacks, Hispanics; and people who live in rural areas (Qualey and Sanger-Katz).” One can say that this presidential initiative is of immeasurable help to the poor in general and to the racial minorities in particular.

2.2.4. Other Legislation:

Furthermore, other pieces of legislation even if more symbolic than effective were intended to decrease racial prejudice by enhancing or reasserting the image and position of the racial minorities. Among these, one could mention the efforts Obama

did to acknowledge the contributions of one of the historically most oppressed minority: that is the Native Americans. Though it is impossible for the American government to restore to the Indians their due and to erase the sufferings inflicted on them, it has initiated some efforts to acknowledge at least the Indians' heritage and contributions to the American culture at large. Among these is the Native American Heritage Day Act (2009) which aim is to honor the heritage of American Indians in American culture. Second, the Tribal Law and Order Act (2010) came to give legitimacy to the Indian political system and organization. The other Americans have long despised Native American culture, way of life and social and political organization. The former even tried during centuries to annihilate them. Just recently has been noticed an effort to acknowledge the richness and contributions of the Native American culture. President Obama has been one of the rare politicians who favored such initiatives.

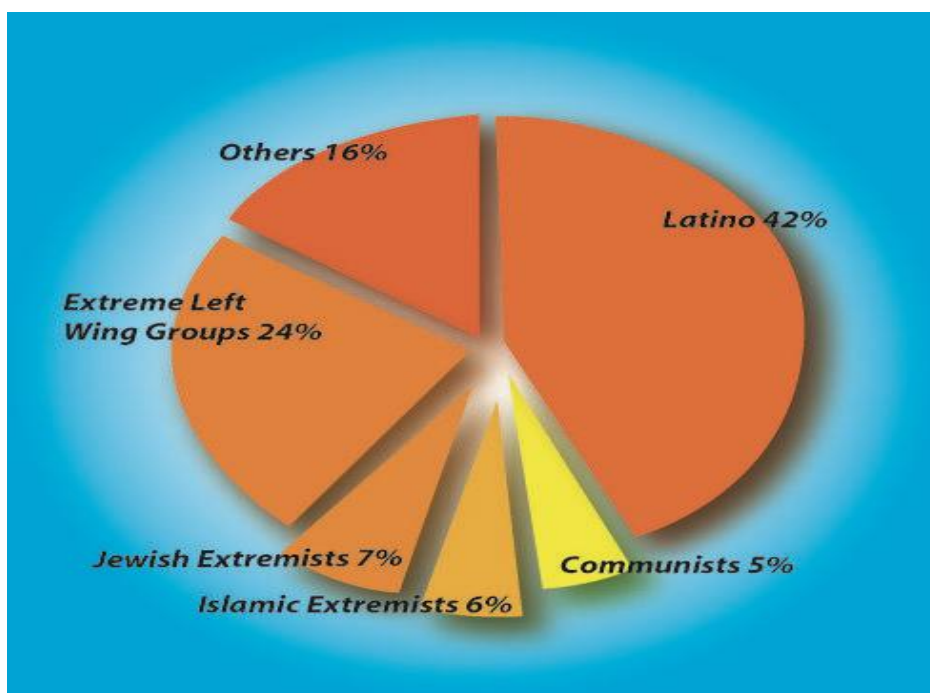
2.3. Through Other Actions:

Furthermore, in order to combat more effectively the persisting racial discrimination in the enforcement of civil rights, Barack Obama increased considerably the budget of the Department of Justice in charge of enforcing civil rights. According to the official White House website, President Obama demanded "two years of double-digit budget" which means the doubling of the usual budget allocated to the Department of Justice. This request on the part of the president aimed to give the adequate tools to this key department to work effectively especially that the budget usually allocated to it was restricted. The sphere of civil rights is indeed a sector in which racial discrimination is still frequent. In fact, racial minorities are the ones suffering most from discrimination. This is why, this action on the part of the President could be interpreted as a means, though indirect, to fight racial

discrimination and to go further towards interracial equality. Of course, racial minorities are not the only victims of discrimination since for instance women, homosexuals and the handicapped are often victims of discrimination too.

In addition, since the beginning of his presidency, Obama has promised he would close the detention camp situated in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The president considered this step to be a means to ease racial tensions. Indeed, in this camp, the American government has detained presumed terrorists in terrible conditions as several ancient detainees testified. These detainees prove to be disproportionately of Arab descent or Arab-Americans. The Arab-American community often denounces this disproportion caused by racial profiling whereby Arab-looking individuals have more chance to be arrested as presumed terrorists. However, as a recent research shows, the majority of terrorists are not Arab or even Muslim Table 12 shows this aspect:

Table 12: Terrorist Attacks on U.S. Soil by Group, From 1980 to 2005, FBI Database



Source: FBI Database.

It is visible through the figure that only 6% of perpetrators of terrorist acts were Muslims. Thus, one understands the scope of the often-heard amalgam according to which not all Muslims are terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims. This is far from representing the reality.

One has to bear in mind that after the 9/11 events, racial discrimination against the Arab-looking Americans intensified. The Arab-American community's experiences of racial discrimination on a daily basis in addition to the treatment inflicted in the detention camp to fellow Arabs deteriorated race relations between Arab-Americans and the rest of the races as well as the situation of this community. In this light, one may consider the promise by President Obama to close Guantanamo as

a gesture not only to stop human rights' abuses but to ease the tensions between the Arab-American community and the rest of the American society as well as.

III. Obama's Mitigated Achievements on Race Relations:

In many people's eyes, Barack Obama represented the savior, the one who would improve the state of the plague of racism and would reduce racial prejudice; thus, he would improve race relations overall. Indeed, and as seen earlier in this dissertation, due to his personality, background and experience, he seemed to represent the ideal person to be able to cope with the persistence of racial prejudice in America. Still, his performance was, for many observers, disappointing. For instance, D'Army Bailey, a former judge, observed the contradiction between the expectations around Barack Obama's election and the reality. He stated in an article entitled: "In the Aftermath of Electing Our First Black President" (2010):

The election of Barack Obama gave hope to millions of African-American and Progressives in America that the first Black President meant we were entering a new era in American politics, an era of heightened tolerance and racial acceptance ... But far from ushering in a new age of hope and equality, the election of Barack Obama seems to have unleashed the worst in American politics. (Bailey 9)

Therefore, did racial prejudice dwindle under Obama's presidency, or on the opposite, did interracial hostility increase? Did the election of an African-American president change anything in race relations? One will try to answer these questions in the following section.

1. Obama's Election: the Fruit of Superficially Decaying Racial Prejudice:

Though Barack Obama's election and re-election may apparently be an indication and a confirmation of America's post-racialism, it is far from being the case actually. First, Obama did not win a majority of the white votes. Many white people did not vote for him because of his race; whether they admit it or were aware of it is another matter. Still, Obama's election did embody a certain decline of racial prejudice. Without a certain retreat of racist feelings, the election of the first African-American president would have been impossible. Even if many Whites still harbor consciously or unconsciously racist sentiment, many others genuinely checked their prejudiced attitudes. Seth Goldman's research paper entitled "The 'Obama Effect' on White Racial prejudice" showed that decline. The researcher states: "my research demonstrates that during the 2008 campaign, long before Obama's election, levels of white racial prejudice declined significantly" (663). This decline was further confirmed by the fact that: "between July 2008 and January 2009, racial prejudice declined by a rate that was at least five times faster than over the two previous decades (Goldman, "Effects of the 2008 Presidential Campaign" 664). Thus, this research comes to corroborate others that noted a certain setback of racial prejudice, which culminated in the election of the first black president.

Not only does Goldman demonstrate the change in attitudes of the voters but explains it too. According to him, white Americans were exposed through Obama to an atypically positive image of Blacks. Whites used to have a pejorative image of the blacks as lazy, violent, and uncultivated. All this represents the opposite image of Obama. Therefore, the latter changed the image that Whites had of Blacks. Accordingly, Goldman assumes that: "exposure to media portrayal of counter-stereotypical out-group exemplars can reduce prejudice in a way similar to face-to-

face contact” (Goldman, “Effects of the 2008 Presidential Campaign” 665). Thus, the significance of the 2008 campaign is that: “[it] represents a rare instance in which whites were massively exposed to a clear positive shift in the balance of black exemplars in mass media” (664). Television coverage of the presidential campaign gave Americans the opportunity to discover another facet of African-Americans. Obama is calm, elegant, intelligent, cultivated and eloquent; which is the opposite of the usual image that Americans in general and Whites in particular have of Blacks. Another important aspect is the powerful influence of media on people’s attitudes and thoughts. The media have the power to forge mentalities and may as such play a fundamental role in the struggle against racial prejudice.

John Dovidio, an eminent psychologist at Yale University, further confirmed this view. According to him, Obama’s election is the culmination of a certain retreat of racial prejudice. In an interview with journalist Kim I. Mills, he stated that, “President Obama’s election is the result of a general, steady decline of racial prejudice over time” (Mills 28). For Dovidio, the election of Obama was the combined effect of the change of attitudes and mentalities, but one should not overlook Obama’s personal role. In this respect, Dovidio conceded that this retreat of racial prejudice was “coupled with Obama’s efforts in his campaign to transcend race in ways that minimized the effects of traditional stereotypes and racism that may have been directed towards him” (Mills 28). Thus, Obama could make people focus less on his racial appurtenance. As a result, he was less subject to the usual clichés people hold about black persons. In this way, he helped reduce somehow the extent of racial prejudice.

Furthermore, Obama’s candidacy was a unifying factor for all the minorities since a large majority of the minority members trusted him and rallied behind him.

This consensus is something positive for inter-minority relations. The fact that a member of a minority reached the highest spheres of power increased the racial pride of not only the black community but also that of the other racial minorities. Therefore, Obama's election shed also light on an amelioration of inter-minority relations.

2. Recrudescence of Racial Prejudice after Obama's Election:

Nevertheless, Goldman's study showed that the decline of racial prejudice did not last for long. Accordingly, he concludes that: "We found that racial prejudice increased in the two years since the end of the campaign, returning to pre-campaign levels" ("the Obama Effect"). Thus, after the end of the campaign and its massive coverage by the mass media, white racial prejudice re-increased. People watched and heard less about Obama; as a result, they were less exposed to this positive image of the black community. This further confirms the power of media on people. Still, the ephemeral effect of media coverage highlights the fact that white prejudice did decline only in surface; if it were a deep change of attitude, then the positive portrayal of Blacks would not have ceased with the end of the campaign. The eradication of racial prejudice requires a fundamental change of attitude that would last even in absence of media coverage and that would resist any exposition to negative exemplars of the black race.

Furthermore, contrary to many expectations, other studies generally highlight a deterioration of race relations and a surge of racial prejudice since Obama's election. First, Janice S. Ellis cites a *Newsweek* poll in her article entitled: "Should President Obama take an active role in addressing Race Relation?": "nearly 60 percent of Americans are now convinced that race relations have either deteriorated or stagnated" since Obama has taken office. She concludes that this new *Newsweek* poll

“confirms that since the election of Barack Obama, many people believe that not only has his election not helped race relations, but may have done more to widen the racial divide.” Here, the study suggests that it is the election of an African-American president which may have impeded race relations, not his actual role as a person. Thus, the outcome of this study does not evoke his deeds. Other studies confirmed this deterioration of racial prejudice after the election of Obama.

Another research comes to corroborate this tendency. Professor Gerald Early cites in his 2011 article: “The Two Worlds of Race Revisited: A Meditation on Race in the Age of Obama,” the findings of a Rasmussen poll that states the following:

A Rasmussen poll published in Fall 2010 reveals that only 36 percent of Americans think the relationship between blacks and whites is getting better. This number is down from 62 percent who, in July 2009, reported feeling that race relations are improving. (11)

The results of this poll prove interesting in several aspects. First, one should note the high percentage (62%) in July 2009, which represents the beginning of President Obama’s first term. This figure highlights the hopes and expectations of improved race relations under the first African-American president. Second, one could note the shrinking of these hopes in a single term with a relatively low percentage (36%) of people feeling the improvement of racial relations. One may perceive this retreat as a bitter return to the reality. Recently, another survey, conducted by Rasmussen Reports some four years later approximately, further confirmed this decline. It found out that just a small minority of people thought that race relations improved since the election of Obama. According to the survey issued in December 2014, only 8% believed in the amelioration of race relations during Obama’s presidency (Rasmussen Reports). In

addition to this extremely low percentage, a great proportion of the participants (42%) tend to believe that race relations deteriorated since the election of Barack Obama (Rasmussen Reports). One should note this surprising result. Still according to the same source, almost half of the participants (48%) believe in the status quo in terms of race relations. Thus, this survey proves to be a confirmation of Americans' impression of absence of amelioration in race relations under Barack Obama. Overall, few Americans believe that the presidency of the first minority representative had a positive impact on the relations between the different races.

Furthermore, another important research came to demonstrate the persistence of racial prejudice. A 2012 article entitled "The Impact of Anti-Black Racism on approval of Barack Obama's Job Performance and on Voting in the 2012 Presidential Election" concluded that: "Anti-black attitudes became slightly more common between 2008 and 2012." This had an impact on the choice of the voters. Accordingly, the article noted that "in 2012, holding negative attitudes towards Blacks increased the likelihood of voting for Mr. Romney and not voting for Mr. Obama" (Pasek et al). Thus according to this study, racial prejudice affects the choice of the voters. Indeed, prejudiced individuals are more likely to reject a candidate on the sole basis of his appurtenance to a certain race. These persons would vote for the white person regardless of his competence just for avoiding to vote for a colored candidate even if the latter seems to be more suitable for the job. As for job performance, the color of the president rather than his competence affected prejudiced people's evaluation of his performance. Accordingly, the article stated that, "People with more negative attitudes towards Blacks were less likely to approve of President Obama's job performance" (Pasek et al.).

Though this study points out at something obvious but which had been denied by many, i.e.: the continuing importance of racial prejudice in motivating voters' choice, it also highlights a point that is most of the time neglected that is the significance of pro-black sentiments in voters' choices. Generally, observers tend to study the negative impact of racial prejudice in rejecting a candidate, but they often overlook the other aspect: the fact that a voter may chose a candidate simply because of his color regardless again of his competence. The article tried to annihilate these biases from voters' choice and arrived at the following conclusion:

Neutralizing anti-Black attitudes led to a projected increase in Mr. Obama's 2012 vote share of 4% points and a projected decrease in Mr. Romney's 2012 vote share of 5% points ... Converting both anti-Black and pro-black attitudes to neutral led to a projected increase in Mr. Obama's 2012 vote share of 2% points and a projected decrease in Mr. Romney's 2012 vote share of 3% points. (Pasek et al,)

Though one has to be careful to the familiar lack of reliability of surveys concerning mentalities and especially racial prejudice, studies are nonetheless more and more accurate due to efforts on the part of the researchers to aim at the subconsciousness not the consciousness of individuals. They aim at discovering what people have really in mind not simply what they declare. In this respect, this study strives to be objective in considering the role of both anti-black and pro-black sentiments in motivating voters' choices. Though the points attributed to bias may seem minimal, one has to bear in mind that in presidential elections, the vote shares are so close between two candidates that such points may make the difference and change completely the outcome of an election. Thus what should be retained from this study is that racial prejudice affects positively or negatively voters' choices. The candidate's race still

determines the choice of some voters in 2012. Obama's race dissuaded some voters to vote from him and pushed some others to vote for him.

Furthermore, racial prejudice seems to regain ground or at least to be more explicitly displayed after a short lull symbolized by the election of the first black president. Indeed, a recent poll reflects the recrudescence of racial prejudice during Obama's presidency. Being aware of the general unreliability of polls regarding racial prejudice, one cautiously chose the Associated Press (AP) poll (2012) as it was conducted with the assistance of several university researchers. In addition, this AP poll is significant because it has taken into consideration both explicit and implicit attitudes of the respondents since, because the outlawing of discrimination and the general condemnation of racism, racist attitudes tend to be more implicit. Finally yet importantly, the survey was conducted online, which enable people to express themselves more freely. Indeed, the respondents do not face any interviewer, a factor that would have made them mute their real opinions. These aspects give the survey a certain reliability. Thus, according to the survey, there is a progression of both explicit and implicit expressions of racial prejudice in 2012 as compared with 2008, both years of Obama's election. The percentage of white Americans holding explicit anti-black views rose from 48% in 2008 to reach 51% four years later. As for implicit attitudes, the percentage increased from 49% in 2008 to 56% in 2012 (Associated Press, *Racial Attitudes Survey*). As far as Hispanics are concerned, the percentage of respondents holding implicitly negative views towards this ethnic group is 57%. These figures highlight several significant facts. First, even if both explicit and implicit prejudiced sentiments increased, the implicit attitudes record both a higher percentage (56% to 51% for explicit ones and a larger increase (plus 7 points for the latter while only 3 points for the explicit attitudes). This shows that people are less

and less inclined to express their bias explicitly. The researchers designed a survey that would detect even unconscious prejudice. As a result, people tend to hold prejudice on an implicit or even subconscious level.

The increase in racial prejudice is real. According to the AP survey, prejudice is not limited to black persons only, it increased even towards other groups like the Hispanics. A majority of white Americans (57%) expressed anti-Hispanic sentiments (AP, *Racial Attitudes Survey*). Here, two tendencies are worth noting. First, according to the survey there is an increase of racial prejudice since Obama's election. As far as expressions of prejudice are concerned, Americans tend to prefer displaying their biased attitudes in a covert way. This demonstrates the fact that American people are conscious of the immorality of racism. Second, it is worth mentioning that according to the study, more people harbor anti-Hispanic sentiments than anti-black prejudice. This finding is quite surprising for two reasons. First, traditionally, white people have demonstrated more aversion towards the black people than towards any other people of color. Even as far as people of color are concerned, white Americans have expressed stronger prejudice towards Blacks rather than towards Indians for example. There were degrees to their racism. Second, as mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, even if race overall has no scientific founding, Hispanics have been wrongly classified as another race in recent censuses. They are in fact an ethnic group that can be considered as White. Thus, the Whites' aversion for Hispanics would be hardly sanctioned scientifically as racism. Furthermore, this survey is also significant because it was conducted four year after the historic election of Barack Obama. Thus, it shows that not only Obama's election did not lead to a post-racial society but also that there is a recrudescence of prejudiced attitudes especially implicit ones.

Conclusion:

In addition to the enormous potential that Barack Obama bears for decreasing racial prejudice and improving race relations, he also has a lucid perception of racism in the United States. This perception, combined with his personal experience with prejudice and discrimination, gives him a unique perspective on the American race problem. Representing the savior for a large part of the American society, Americans and the world expected him to bring some improvement in race relations and in racial minorities' status and conditions. First, he held powerful and eloquent speeches referring to the race problem. Through his eloquence, he strove hard to unify Americans regardless of their race. In addition, he did initiate a certain number of executive orders and sign some important pieces of legislation that could have some effect on race relations. Although one could not deny his efforts, Obama attained only mitigated achievements in the struggle against prejudice and discrimination. Contrary to some observers' and many people's expectations, racial prejudice seemed even to increase during his presidency. The majority of surveys corroborate this tendency debunking the myth of post-racialism in Obama's presidency. Analysts generally acknowledge the deterioration in race relations under Obama. Many believe that if they have not deteriorated, they have not improved either. The most optimistic believe in a stagnation of the state of race relations. Thus, racial prejudice persists despite the exceptionality and efforts of the first African-American president. Consequently, whose fault is it? It would be judicious to assess Barack Obama's responsibility in the persistence of racial prejudice. This is going to be the issue debated in the next chapter.

Chapter Five:

Assessment of Barack Obama's Responsibility in the Persistence of Racial Prejudice

Introduction:

President Barack Obama appeared to be the ideal candidate to fight the persisting racial prejudice. In regards to his particular background and own experience, he seemed to represent the best asset to weaken racial prejudice in the United States. Nevertheless, despite these facts and his efforts, the first black American president could obtain only disappointing results. In this chapter, one will assess Obama's responsibility in the persistence of racial prejudice. The following questions will be the beacon of the reasoning: Should one reasonably blame Obama? If yes, to what extent could he be held responsible for the continuing race problem? Was his mission impossible from the onset? In attempting to answer these questions, one will be able to evaluate Obama's personal burden in the perpetuation of racial prejudice.

I. Factors Linked to Obama Himself:

In this section, one will peer into the factors that are linked to Barack Obama himself. These of course will highlight the personal responsibility of the president in the perpetuation of racial prejudice.

1. His Self-Presentation as a “Post-Racial” Candidate:

Observers generally agreed that during his campaign, Barack Obama presented himself as a “post-racial” candidate. Media in general also presented him as such. Indeed, he did not portray himself as the candidate of the African-American community, like for instance Jesse Jackson before him, and he did not focus on race as an issue. This was for the obvious purpose of attracting a maximum of Americans in order to be elected. History Professor David A. Hollinger noted this strategy in an article entitled “Obama, the Instability of Color Lines, and the Promise of a Post-ethnic Future.” According to him, the focus of media depictions of Obama as post-racial is due to two aspects: first “his self-presentation with minimal references to his colour” (1033). Indeed, during his campaign and even as president, Obama has seldom referred to his skin color. Second, he did not present himself as the leader of the black community: “Obama has never offered himself as the candidate of a particular ethnoracial group” (1033). This strategy was the target of criticism. For instance, scholar Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, specialized in race relations, stressed the dangerous implications of such attitude. Sociologists Bernadette K. Garam and Jeneve Brooks cited his remarks in a paper entitled “Students’ Perceptions of Race and Ethnic Relations Post Obama’s Election,” stating that:

Obama has purposely tried to portray himself as a post-racial president, in order to broaden his political appeal. Bonilla-Silva asserts that this is

dangerous because Obama will not institute meaningful policies that address racial inequalities, furthering Americans' problem of color-blind racism (78)

Lopez went even farther emphasizing Barack Obama's reluctance towards raising the issue of race or facing the race problem. In his article entitled: "Post-Racial Racism: Racial stratification and Mass Incarceration in the Age of Obama," he stressed that: "For his part, Obama seems disinclined to lead a national conversation on race, let alone on the necessity of confronting continuing racial hierarchy" (1024).

Indeed, one should concede that during his two presidential campaigns, Barack Obama seldom referred to his skin color; in addition, he did not present himself as the leader of any community and did not propose any direct agenda to fight racial prejudice. Even if it is true that it may prove an effective strategy to attract the white electorate, this maneuver certainly had repercussions on the state of racial prejudice in the United States. This attitude seems to highlight a certain ignorance or neglect of the racial issue. Unfortunately, one cannot solve a problem by simply ignoring it or not referring to it. The race problem is such a deeply-rooted and tricky issue that one should confront it directly with a powerful agenda. Nevertheless, stressing his race and presenting himself as the leader of the African-American community exclusively would have probably cost him the election. Thus, one could objectively concede that in regards of his goal that is the presidential election, Obama chose the wisest strategy. therefore, one can say that the race problem has been sacrificed for the sake of election. Nevertheless, to say that in order to win, an Afro-American candidate has to play white and to avoid referring to the racial issue is to highlight that in fact, Americans did not get rid of their prejudice and that they are visibly not ready to confront the racial issue. In this regard, the United States is far from being truly post-

racial as it claims to be. Thus, Obama's strategy for gaining the presidential race is understandable even though some may consider it disputable. Then, one will peer into his actions to assess his real determination to reduce racial prejudice or not.

2. Insufficient Efforts on Race Relations:

Secondly, Obama's responsibility in the persistence of racial prejudice could be due to his insufficient efforts in improving race relations. Indeed, critics have reproached him to neglect somehow the race problem. For them, it is far from being one of his priorities. One of these critics is Thomas J. Sugrue who stated:

Whatever the impact of Obama's antipoverty, civil rights, education and housing initiatives will be, it is clear that they are far from the top of his agenda. Those who expect that the first African-American president will risk the political controversy of pushing hard on issues of racial equality might do well to listen to his own words. (135)

Based on his speeches, the race problem does not appear among his priorities. It would be judicial to remind that for his first term: economic recovery, energy independence and health care reform were his top priorities. As for the second term, he focused his efforts on immigration reform, economic stabilization and taxation. The president did not even rank the race problem as among secondary issues. He did refer to the persisting racial prejudice and discrimination in his speeches as seen in the previous sections of this work, but he never mentioned a clear program to eradicate this plague from the American society. When examining his actions, one can note that executive orders and signed legislation against racial prejudice and discrimination are a rarity when compared with the total number of orders and laws issued during his two terms. Indeed, they were a handful while the legislative and

executive branches issued hundreds of laws and orders. Another aspect worth mentioning is that the rare legislation concerning racial minorities has been issued at the beginning of his first term. Such steps have gradually faded to become almost nonexistent in the second term.

Two researchers, Ginny G. Lane and Amy E. White, highlight this lack of efforts undertaken by the president in an article entitled: “The Roots of Resegregation: Analysis and Implications.” Indeed, they noted that:

As shown [...], the role of the Executive is crucial in bringing appropriate political alignment to bear in the area of the civil rights and education [...]. Unfortunately, the political voice of Barack Obama (where desegregation is concerned) clearly echoes the previous administrations’ policies. (93)

Lane and White here accuse Barack Obama of insufficient efforts to counter discrimination in the crucial fields of civil rights and education. For them, Obama’s policy as far as discrimination is concerned does not differ much from those of his predecessors. This means that contrary to what had been expected from the first African-American president, Obama did not make particular efforts to fight racial prejudice and discrimination. On the same tone, some members of the black community blame him for not making enough for Blacks. Among these is Malik Miah, an African-American activist. In an article entitled “Race and Class: Obama Forgets the Black Community,” he noted:

The African-American community is Obama’s strongest supporter and will never ever turn against him, no matter his policies. Because

Obama and his team — especially his Black advisers — know this, they are letting African Americans down.

Being the first African-American on the highest office, Obama is a source of immense pride for the black community from whom he received 98 % of the vote. Indeed, as Miah stated it, their support is unconditioned. Even if he does not do anything for them, they would not retrieve their support. Thus, the activist reproaches to Obama his insufficient efforts towards the black community. He explains this attitude by stating that:

Obama is genuinely concerned about the sufferings of the Black community, but like all crossover Black elected officials who need the white vote to be in office, he downplays his “color” and the realities of racism. He even does so when speaking before mostly Black audiences.

To sum up, the activist sustains that Obama sacrifices the needs of the black community on the altar of political success. Indeed, in order to get the white vote, Obama has to pretend that the United States has reached post-racialism. Just few African-American intellectuals, like Miah, denounce this “betrayal” on the part of the president. The majority of the black community, however, still unconditionally backs him. Objectively thus, Obama is definitively not making enough efforts towards the reduction of racial prejudice and discrimination.

3. The Lack of Legislation Concerning Racial Groups and the Focus on Other Minorities:

Thirdly, President Obama did defend minorities' rights but even when doing so, he seemed to be more attached to focus on women, the disabled and especially the homosexual community rather than racial minorities. The determination of the president to help these minorities is visible right from the beginning. In his second Inaugural Address, he stated:

It is now our generation's task to carry on what those pioneers began. For our journey is not complete until our wives, our mothers and our daughters can earn a living equal to their effort. Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law. (Office of the Press Secretary)

Thus, gender equality and the fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation are clearly one of the president's concerns perhaps even more, apparently, than the race problem. To illustrate this point, one can mention several executive orders or pieces of legislation signed by president Obama that target these minorities. Cited in the previous chapter is the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act of 2009, which is primarily a powerful tool against gender pay discrimination in the workplace even if its scope was enlarged to fight against any other form of discrimination. This was pointed out in the official presentation of the law; its aim is, "to make it easier for people to get the pay they deserve_ regardless of their gender, race or age" (US Congress). Another example is a piece of legislation commonly referred to as Rosa's Law, which the president signed on 23 September 2010. This piece of legislation concerned mental retardation (U.S. Congress). Still another example is the "Violence

against Women Reauthorization Act signed on 7 March 2013 (US Congress).

Comparatively, the president seemed to be more concerned with these minorities than with treating the ancestral race problem. It remains that these efforts of course are praiseworthy since historically women, the homosexuals and the disabled have suffered like, if not more than, the racial minorities. They know sometimes the same oppression on the part of the dominant white, male, heterosexual and able population, and politicians seldom regarded their lot. Nevertheless, one should concede that it is true that these initiatives benefit also racial minorities since we have women and homosexuals among them, but the repercussions are less significant than when the racial problem is targeted directly.

A blatant factor that one could consider as a piece of evidence of Obama's insufficient efforts on race relations is the number of presidential actions targeting the race problem. One could note that very few executive orders and acts address the race problem directly. As seen in the former chapters, Obama tends to opt for a more indirect way to improve race relations. However, even seen in this angle, legislation and orders that concern racial minorities remain scarce when compared with the tremendous number of laws and orders issued. In addition, one can notice that such presidential actions tend to be more enacted during his first term and more precisely during his first two years. Indeed, the majority of acts and orders passed to enhance racial minorities' status were issued in 2009 and 2010. Thus when regarding the number of presidential actions addressing the race problem, one can conclude that it seems far from being a priority issue for the president.

4. Partiality and Awkward Reactions in Interracial Incidents:

4.1. The Trayvon Martin Case

Barack Obama allegedly bears some responsibility in the deterioration of race relations and the current resurgence of interracial animosity due to his awkward reactions when interracial incidents occurred. Many persons accused him of having reacted subjectively and emotionally in cases when Blacks were allegedly abused. His remarks or reactions have, according to many observers, deeply harmed race relations and undermined the progress so far made in the reduction of racial prejudice. A notable example of such episodes is the case of Trayvon Martin, a young black male killed allegedly in defense by a young male of Jewish descent. As an African-American man, the president reacted quite emotively to the incident and made remarks that many interpreted as divisive. In view of the African-American history of injustice and the president's own experience with racial discrimination, the incident deeply touched his personal feelings. Thus, it is more the man rather than the president who uttered the comments after the homicide. In a press conference given on 19 July 2013 he remarked:

You know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot I said that this could have been my son. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago. (“Remarks on Trayvon”)

This reaction may sound natural but some media and people fustigated Obama for such remarks. Interpreted as highly divisive, these words had heavy consequences on the state of relations between Whites and Blacks in particular and on race relations in general. As the President of the United States, he is supposed to be the representative of all Americans. Thus, to identify with a particular section of the society is contrary

to a president's ethics. It means that in taking side with a part, he is implicitly taking side against the other part. In this particular case, by taking side with the black community, he stood against the white community especially the Jewish one. This stands against the role of the president as cement for the whole society. Obama was condemned for these comments since they could raise tensions and foment problems between the two communities. The president accordingly received much criticism in view of the divisive implications of his remarks.

An aggravating factor is that the justice and the population in general believed that it was a case of legitimate defense deprived of any racial motive. People generally considered that President Obama was wrong in giving this incident a racial overtone. According to the jury that acquitted Zimmermann, the case is not a hate crime in which race would be the dominant motive in the killing. Zimmermann's lawyer, Mark O' Mara, expressed this view while at the same time, praising the president's courage to speak about race. CNN journalist Tom Cohen reported his words in a 2013 article:

It takes courage to talk about race. It took courage for our President to address the Zimmerman Case and candidly discuss how and why people are upset by the verdict, [...] while we acknowledge and understand the racial context of this case, we challenge people to look closely and dispassionately at the facts. We believe those who look at the facts of the case without prejudice will see that it is a clear case of self-defense. (qtd. in Cohen)

Thus, according to the lawyer, prejudice or racial hatred did not primarily motivate the assassination even if he acknowledged the "racial context," and he invited people

to examine the incident more objectively i.e.: without preconceived ideas. The lawyer indirectly targeted the president who somehow lacked objectivity in this affair.

Obama in dividing the American society has been accused of betraying his function as the president of all Americans. Whatever the impact of the president's remarks, the chief message that seems to emanate from his discourse is that racial disparity is a reality, which American people should not deny. On the contrary, Americans should address the race problem with non-violent solutions. Obama considers the general protest among the African-American community as natural, but he urged people to act pacifically. He is by the way ready to secure non-violence. He states:

I think it's understandable that there have been demonstrations and vigils and protests, and some of that stuff is just going to have to work its way through, as long as it remains nonviolent. If I see any violence, then I will remind folks that that dishonors what happened to Trayvon Martin and his family. (Remarks on Trayvon)

Moreover, his primary aim seems to explain the pain and frustration felt by the African-American community after the pronouncement of the verdict; these feelings seem to him quite legitimate.

Another remark in the same speech poured much ink and raised much indignation. Reacting to the Zimmermann verdict of non-guilt, Barack Obama stated, "And that all contributes I think to a sense that if a white male teen was involved in the same kind of scenario, that, from top to bottom, both the outcome and the aftermath might have been different" (Remarks on Trayvon). This remark highlights the reality of racial disparity between Whites and Blacks and the discrimination that

Blacks often confront in the American judicial system especially at the hands of the police and the state courts. According to Obama and many in the black community, if the case involved a white teenager, the media and people in general would not have treated it in the same way, and the verdict would have been perhaps different. Though surely legitimate in view of the well-documented role of the victim's and offender's skin color in the treatment of cases, this remark on the part of a person holding the highest office certainly had heavy implications. It certainly gave strength to the mistrust that many minority members particularly the African-Americans already felt towards the American judicial system. The expression "from top to bottom" refers to the authorities above to the masses, i.e.: to the ordinary people. Therefore, according to Obama, the whole society would have reacted otherwise if the incident involved the killing of a white adolescent instead of a black one. Nevertheless, though visibly disagreeing with the verdict, he urged the Americans to accept the decision of the justice. He pointed out:

The judge conducted the trial in a professional manner. The prosecution and the defense made their arguments. The juries were properly instructed that in a case such as this reasonable doubt was relevant, and they rendered a verdict. And once the jury has spoken, that's how our system works. (Remarks on Trayvon)

In the same speech, he suggested solutions to the problem of racial disparity in criminal justice.

4.2. The Gates' Case:

Another case that brought much criticism to President Obama is the Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates' faulty arrest in front of his own house by police officers

who believed he was trying to burgle. This incident happened at the beginning of the president's first term in July 2009. Barack Obama was accused to exacerbate the already existing tensions between the racial communities and to undermine the progress done in race relations. After the wrong arrest of Gates, Obama commented this blunder condemning harshly this action. At a White House news conference held on 22 July 2009, the President stated:

I don't know, not having been there and not seeing all the facts, what role race played in that, but I think it's fair to say, No. 1, any of us would be pretty angry; No. 2, that the Cambridge police acted stupidly in arresting somebody when there was already proof that they were in their own home; and No. 3, what I think we know separate and apart from this incident is there is a long history in this country of African-Americans and Latinos being stopped by police disproportionately. That's just a fact. (White House)

Significant points emanate from these comments. To begin with, Obama has been cautious to admit that he was not a witness to the arrest. Consequently, he could not determine the extent to which race was a motivation in the arrest. Despite his absence from the scene, he drew three conclusions from the incident. Firstly, he legitimizes Gates' anger at his arrest in front of his own house. Secondly and this is what scandalized Americans: the qualification of the Cambridge police officers' reaction as "stupid." According to him, arresting a person while having evidence of the person's identity is a silly fault. People condemned harshly the president's use of the adjective "stupid" to refer to the police's act; Obama's reaction was in contradiction with the proper behavior of a president; indeed, the president is supposed to stand with the authorities. Finally, the president took the opportunity of the incident to shed light and

attract people's attention on a reality that they tend to ignore or deny; that is the too frequent racial discrimination towards African-American and Hispanics in law enforcement. Indeed, as the president pointed out, extensive data show evident racial profiling towards the two minority communities. He reminded to the American population the long history of racial profiling.

The fact that the victim of this arrest is one of the president's friends played undeniably a role in the violence of his reaction. He acknowledges his subjectivity when he said in the same news conference, "Well, I should say at the outset that Skip Gates is a friend, so I may be a little biased here" (News Conference, 22 July 2009). The long history of racial profiling of which African-Americans are disproportionately victims has undoubtedly exacerbated his reaction. The incident was an occasion for the President to talk about race, something that he scarcely does. He noted from the incident the evidence of the persistent significance of race; he asserted in the same speech: "It's a sign of how race remains a factor in this society" (Obama, News Conference). For him, the case is a blatant case of racial profiling. It is a proof of the persistence of racism in the American society.

As a result, Barack Obama's management of the two significant racial incident involving Trayvon Martin and Henry L. Gates was subject to harsh criticism. According to many, the president's remarks exacerbated race relations and fuelled racial animosity, further dividing the American society. The president's identification with Trayvon and the use of the adverb "stupidly" to refer to the police's behavior in Gates' case are at the origin of the controversies that touched the President. This awkward handling of the cases contributed according to critics to the deterioration of race relations. According to Gerald Early, Obama should have abstained himself from intervening in local affairs. He added:

Moreover, many whites were uncomfortable about the president's rush to judgment of the Cambridge police. After all, it is true that blacks and Latinos are stopped disproportionately by the police, but it also true that they commit a hugely disproportionate share of violent crime in America-the other half of the fact that that Obama's initial response seemed to elide. (12)

For Early, the incomplete image of the reality given by the president and his hasty condemnation of the police undermined the process of improving race relations. In addition to criticisms by personalities and members of law enforcement, polls confirm that disapproval. According to an opinion poll released by the Pew Research Center, more people (41%) disapproved the handling of the situation by the president than people who approved (29%) (Table 13). One can note that a great number of people (30%) had no opinion (Pew Research Center). Still, the majority of people were displeased by the way the president reacted to the situation. This incident together with other issues had repercussions on his popularity. Of greater significance is the loss of Obama's popularity subsequent to that incident, notably among the white voters. A *Daily Telegraph* article entitled "Barack Obama's support falls among white voters" noted this retreat too (Harnden).

Table 13: People’s Reaction on Obama’s Handling of the Gates’ Affair:

No Consensus on Gates Dispute, But Obama’s Handling Criticized		
	Total	White non-Hisp
<i>Obama’s handling of H.L. Gates situation**</i>	%	%
Approve	29	22
Disapprove	41	45
Don’t know	30	33
<i>Who was more at fault?</i>		
Henry Louis Gates	27	29
James Crowley	25	22
Both equally (Vol.)	10	10
Neither (Vol.)	3	4
Don’t know (Vol.)	36	35
** Results of a re-contact survey of 480 respondents (including 391 white non-Hispanics) conducted Monday, July 27.		

Source: Pew Research Center, “Obama’s Ratings Slide Across the Board,” July 30, 2009.

Thus, these are two examples of Obama’s alleged direct role in the degradation of race relations.

Nevertheless, despite the supposed profound impact of these two incidents on the popularity of the president and the state of race relations, it would be judicial to note Obama’s subsequent efforts to mend these allegedly awkward reactions. In both cases, he tried to appease the tensions created by his declarations. Indeed, he later regretted the use of the word “stupid”. First, after his condemnation of the Cambridge police, he invited the policeman in question James Crowley and Henry Louis Gates to what was referred to ironically as the “beer summit”, a meeting in the White House over beers to discuss the incident and to appease any tensions between the two men (Feller). Through this initiative, Obama intended first to solve the conflict between the two men in order to prevent Americans from taking this incident as a springboard or

justification for further racial animosity. Second, he wished to prove to the public his neutrality and his will of reconciliation to make people forget about his reference to the police behavior as “stupid”. His words prove this reconciliatory effort; he said, “I have always believed that what brings us together is stronger than what pulls us apart” (Feller). Nevertheless, observers noted that despite the expression of mutual respect of the protagonists, none apologized to the other; neither Crowley for the arrest, nor Gates for his injurious words towards the policeman, nor Obama for qualifying the arrest of stupid act. Similarly, after the second incident involving the killing of Trayvon, Obama made a poignant and touching speech in which he appealed to the black community to accept the verdict; he urged also the American society not to ignore the legacy of racial profiling that continues to touch disproportionately the African-American community. Acknowledging this dangerous matter-of-fact, he suggested solutions to that discrimination involving the participation of all. He asserted:

That doesn't mean, though, that as a nation we can't do some things that I think would be productive. So let me just give a couple of specifics that I'm still bouncing around with my staff, so we're not rolling out some five-point plan, but some areas where I think all of us could potentially focus. (“Remarks on Trayvon”)

Although critics accused the president of peering into and gauging this incident through a purely racial lens, he took the opportunity to try to launch the nation into a reflection on how to find solutions to the problem of racial profiling. For him, American people should not elude that reality; this would hamper its acknowledgement. Instead, all should work hand in hand. Therefore, the appeasing and reconciliatory efforts of the president are praiseworthy; Americans should not

overlook these efforts. Nevertheless, many would consider that Obama's awkward reactions have already harmed race relations and that the president's subsequent mea culpa came too late.

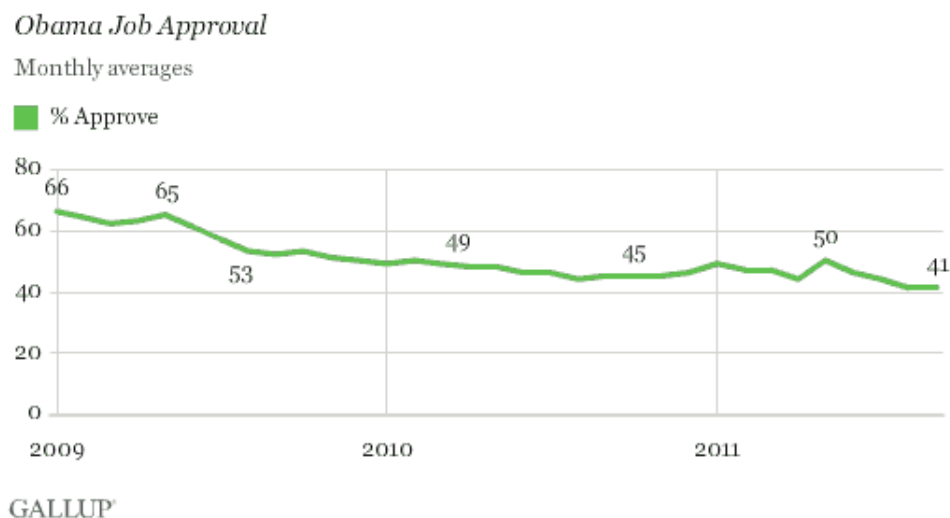
5. Signing Legislation Harming Race Relations:

Though he was not at the origin of the law, President Obama signed on 31 December 2011 the National Defense Authorization Act for the 2012 fiscal year (NDAA). The American Congress issues such laws every year to decide for the budget and prerogatives of the Department of Defense. This piece of legislation not only represents a serious case of erosion to the constitution, but it has also a potential to harm indirectly the position of racial minorities especially the Arab-Muslim community of the United States. Indeed, Congress abrogated one of the fundamental protections secured in the American constitution for pretext of the exceptional situation that is the war on terror. Terrorism represents a threat to the nation; so Congress permitted that some of the fundamental rights provided by the Bill of Rights may be infringed. Amendment V states that, "No person shall... be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law" (US Const., Amend. V). Besides, Amendment VI asserts that, "in all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury..." (US Const., Amend. VI). The problem is that the NDAA ignores such fundamental individual protections provided by the American Constitution. Subtly, the law enables the authorities to trespass that fundamental right in subsection 1021-1023. In a context of war on terrorism, the police could detain an individual for an indefinite period without "due process of law (Lodget).

This erosion of the constitution opens the door for all sorts of abuse since individuals do no longer enjoy the protection of the law against any governmental abuse. Even if it is mainly foreigners that are targeted, American citizens are not excluded from the provisions of the law. Logically, Americans of Arab descent were often victims of racial profiling because of the widely shared prejudice that associate Arabs with terrorism. In this way, such prerogative may deteriorate relations between the races. Thus, Obama should not have signed such piece of legislation for several reasons. First, the American system is designed in such a manner that each branch checks and balances the other. Each should be faithful to the principles of the constitution and defend them. In case one of the representatives trespasses or violates the Constitution, the other branches should stop him. In this case, the executive branch should have checked the legislative branch. It is in the power of the president to veto propositions of laws that go against the Constitution. Critics blamed him for failing to stop Congress in this violation of the founding document.

6. A Growing Disapproval of Barack Obama's Policies:

Another factor undermining Obama's potential efforts on reducing racial prejudice is the people's declining support of his policies. Indeed, more and more Americans have become dissatisfied with Obama's function. Numerous sources corroborate this tendency. To begin with, a Gallup chart (Table 14) shows the percentage of people approving Obama's job from the beginning of his presidency to autumn 2011. A steady decline in that percentage is clearly visible through the chart. Starting his presidential term in 2009 with a maximum of 66 % of people approving his job, he fell almost three years later to the lowest percentage of only 41 %. Thus, the unpopularity of his policies is visible here. More and more people are dissatisfied with his presidency.

Table 14: Obama Job Approval 2009-2012:

Source: Gallup

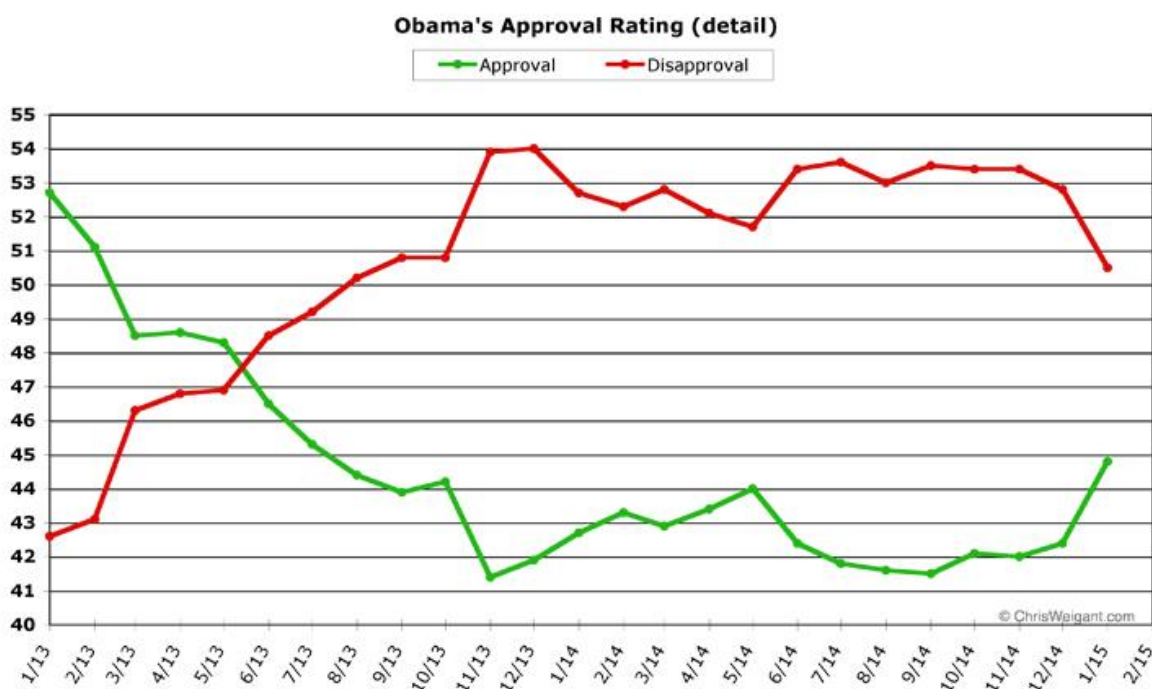
In addition, the findings of another survey conducted by the Associated Press leads to the same conclusion. This poll compares Obama's job approval in 2010, then two years later. Three questions prove of certain significance and are instrumental in showing the growing disapproval towards the then newly elected president. First, respondents had to answer the following question: "Generally speaking, would you say things in this country are heading in the right direction or in the wrong direction?" To this question, 45% answered in the right direction in 2010 while this number decreased to 34 % in 2012 (AP-Gfk Poll 2009 & 2012). Thus, in solely two years, 9% percent of people changed their mind and became more pessimistic. The disapproval is even more evident with the proportion of people thinking the country in moving in the wrong direction. Indeed, in 2010 already, 55 % of the respondents opted for the country taking the wrong direction. Two years later, two thirds of the respondents thought that way with a percentage of 65 % (AP-Gfk Poll 2009&2012). The answers to the second question come to corroborate this tendency. The respondents were asked: "overall, do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve or disapprove of the

way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?" Only 19 % of the respondents strongly approved the president's job in 2010, this number fell to 13 % in 2012. Besides, 22 % somewhat approved it in 2010, this figure lost just one point two years later. As far as people who have mixed feeling, the percentage is 26 % in 2010 remaining stable two years later (27 %) (AP-Gfk Poll 2009 & 2012). Moreover, 10 % somewhat disapprove the president's job in 2010 as well as in 2012. Finally, the percentage of people strongly disapproving the president's job increased from 24 % in 2010 to 27 % two years later. Of significance here is that the changes concern the two extremes i.e.: the strong approval, which decreased substantially and the strong disapproval, which increased. Lastly, another question in the same survey highlights Americans' pessimism and dissatisfaction: whether Barack Obama would bring change as he promised in his first campaign. In 2010, almost half the respondents believed so while a dramatic decrease occurred two years later. In 2012, only 28 % thought that the president would bring about change (AP-Gfk Poll 2009 & 2012). Here, the decrease is significant since just a minority still believed about the president's potential for change bringing. Thus, one can retain from the findings of this survey that people were growing dissatisfied with Obama's policies and they increasingly disapproved the way he was handling his job as president.

Moreover, this discontent is still present in the president's second term. Numerous sources shed light on this aspect. Among these, a chart of the president's approval rating gauged the period from January 2013 to January 2015. In this chart (Table 15), several important aspects are highlighted. First, at the beginning of 2013, more people approved the president's job than people who disapproved. Nevertheless, as visible in the figure, starting from May 2013, the two curves invert with more people disapproving than people approving. Afterwards, from August 2013 onwards,

there were more than half the people who disapproved Obama's job. The lowest percentage of approval (almost 41 %) as well as the highest percentage of disapproval (54 %) corresponds to the same date i. e.: November 2013.

Table 15: Obama's Approval Rating



Source : Business Insider, 3 March 2011.

Thus, through the three documents used, one can notice a steady decrease in the Obama's approval rating with more and more people disapproving the way the president is handling his job. This growing unpopularity had an impact on the president's capacity to propose policies and to make them accepted. Undeniably, then, people would not back the policies he would suggest especially if it concerns controversial issues such as racial prejudice. Therefore, this growing disapproval put the president into a tricky situation in which he had little room for maneuver. Even if

he had the intention to introduce any policy to reduce racial prejudice and discrimination, he could hardly implement it.

II. External Factors

Even if Barack Obama has certainly a part of responsibility in the persistence of racial prejudice in the American society, external factors seem to play a more crucial role in the endurance of the race problem. Indeed, several apparently insuperable obstacles stand on the way of the eradication of racism. These factors are stronger than, and independent of, President Obama regardless of the latter's determination to decrease or not racial prejudice.

1. The Nature of the Task:

Primarily, the nature of the task itself stands as a gigantic obstacle in the struggle against racial prejudice. Indeed, a single individual could not possibly eradicate this plague. Obama is plainly conscious about the persistence of the race problem, but he is also aware about the fact that it could not be a single individual's task. For him, the elimination of racism is a collective as well as an individual burden. In Dupuis and Boeckelman's biography of Obama, the authors stated that the president "balanced the responsibilities of society at large with the responsibilities of individuals for overcoming racism" (85). Generally, for any task, Obama tends to preach the collective effort rather than the individual one. He values the strength of the number for overcoming any obstacle. In his speeches, he often reiterates this belief. For instance in his first inaugural address, all throughout the speech, he uses the personal pronoun "we" and possessive adjective "our"; he included himself in the

American population to emphasize not only the unity of the American society but also to stress the importance of collectivity in achievement. He stresses that whatever achievements have been realized, they were the fruit of people's efforts not simply those of the governing few. He states for instance:

At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because we the people have remained faithful to the ideals of our forbearers, and true to our founding documents. (Inaugural Address 1)

The president sees every aspect through the collective lens. Accordingly, he always uses the adjective "common" as for instance "our common good", "our common defense"... (Inaugural Address 1+). Thus, even with all the determination of the world, a single person even in the highest office cannot solve the race problem alone. The nature of the task itself implies an individual as well as a collective effort. The president may solely propose measures to attempt at improving the status of racial minorities or relations between minorities. It is nevertheless impossible for the leading individuals to eliminate racial prejudice, which is a more personal struggle. In addition to the efforts done at the level of the government, each individual should provide some effort on his own beliefs to fight any racial prejudice. Thus, the elimination of racial prejudice cannot depend on one person, be it the president.

2. The Complexity of the Problem of Race and Race Prejudice:

Eliminating racial prejudice from the American society is an immense challenge due to the complexity of the race problem. Even if racial discrimination could be fought more or less successfully, racial prejudice is another matter. As seen in the previous chapter, there had been a will to eradicate racial discrimination from

the American society starting in the second half of the nineteenth century. As seen in the third chapter of this work, in a series of laws, Congress outlawed racial discrimination. Theoretically speaking, it meant that people could no longer be treated differently based on their race. As a result, huge progress resulted from this consensual attack. Racial minorities could dispose of better opportunities, which enabled them to enhance their position in society. This in turn made the white majority look at them under a better light. Overall, the relations between the races somehow improved together with the status and image of the racial minorities. This betterment of the colored people's perception among the white population associated with a rising self-esteem among minorities led to a certain decline of racial prejudice. Nevertheless, racial discrimination still exists despite its unlawfulness as seen in chapter four of this work. It persists in fact under subtler, less overt forms. Being less visible, such indirect form of discrimination is very difficult to fight.

Even more difficult to identify and to struggle against is racial prejudice since it pertains to the individual's mentality. For the government, it is not possible to control people's minds. Another factor that renders the race problem even more complex is that people themselves are not sometimes aware of their racial prejudice. Indeed, as researchers such as John Dovidio, Sylvia Perry and many others have discovered, racial prejudice may solely exist on a subconscious level. Thus, how could it be possible to fight an "invisible" enemy? How is it possible to struggle against prejudice which people themselves are not aware of? Indeed, as a group of researchers noted: "[a]wareness of personally- held biases are widely considered as a critical step in reducing an individual's prejudice and discrimination" (Perry et al. 64). The complexity of the problem is a factor independent of the president's will, which

the president has a limited ascendance on; this is why, this powerlessness lessens his responsibility in the persistence of racial prejudice.

3. The Illusion of Color-Blindness: Race: a Taboo in American Politics

Another obstacle confronting Barack Obama is paradoxically his race. Having not been an eliminating condition for his election, Obama's appurtenance to the African-American category led to difficulties in attempting to improve the racial minorities' conditions and race relations in general. This is because the United States claims to have entered a post-racial era and as such, it has become a taboo to refer to race. For many white Americans especially, racism seems a problem of the past; for them it does no longer exist. Thus, a politician who would claim that racial prejudice and racial inequality still exist nowadays risks his condemnation by those Whites who deny the continuing existence of that problem. Race as a taboo in politics is noticeable very early in Obama's presidential career. Indeed, during his 2008 campaign, he had been very careful when referring to this subject. His staff advised him not to refer to the topic only in case he was asked about it directly as Thomas J. Sugrue describes:

Even though Barack Obama had spent part of his career as a civil rights attorney and had a long track of record of grappling with racial issues as a community activist and legislator, his advisors feared that he would be branded as a 'special interest' candidate, or as a racial firebrand who would discount the interests of the majority if he raised issues of racial disparities and inequality on the campaign trail. (108)

Therefore, despite his knowledge and experience in racial issues, he preferred to avoid lingering on the topic in order to prevent the public from categorizing him and labeling him as a racial leader obsessed only by issues related to race. Moreover, he

was careful not to be associated exclusively with the black community, the Muslim one or any other. In his speeches, he claims explicitly: "I'm not running a race-based campaign. I'm rooted in the African-American community but I'm not limited by it" (qtd. in Dupuis and Boeckelman 85). For him, his identity is multiple and to narrow it to a single community would be an unnecessary limitation. His origins are African-American, but he refuses that people label him as exclusively as such. As such, he eludes a possible accusation of working for and serving only one community.

Accordingly, he states:

As the 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 niece of Chinese descent, with some blood relatives who resemble Margaret Thatcher and others who would 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 work on the basis of tribe. (qtd. in Hill 39)

Barack Obama has presented a profile of a president for all Americans, and he indirectly promises that he would serve all Americans regardless of their race. Besides, this strategy serves to reassure the white voters that he will not only serve the interests of the black community.

Next, the logical question that entails is to investigate on whether Obama's race was more an advantage or a disadvantage. Even if the tendency is to say that his

career has not been easy due to his race, other analysts assume that his race has been more an advantage. For instance, Benjamin Wallace-Wills states:

Yet, there are a few Black politicians for whom their race isn't a ball-and-chain, but a jet engine_ the feature that launches them into stardom. For this small group of black politicians, race has been an advantage because whites see in them that America, finally, is working.
(qtd. in Dupuis and Boeckelman 87-88)

According to Wills, Obama is among the few black politicians for whom race is an advantage that propels them into fame. Indeed, Whites are willing to accept the accession of a limited number of colored people and this for a certain purpose: to show the truth of the American dream: that any individual, whatever his race, can succeed. It serves also to prove that the United States reached the ideal of equality and to show that eventually it is faithful to its creed.

In addition, some other analysts assume that Obama was not subject to the usual prejudices that white voters nurture towards black politicians. The reason lies in his exceptional background. His biographers Dupuis and Boeckelman assert that: "Obama's unique background inoculates him from some of the negative stereotypes that whites have about Black candidates" (125). Thus according to some analysts, Obama did not really undergo the same treatment as his black counterparts as far as his racial appurtenance is concerned; some even assume that it helped more than it handicapped him. Nevertheless, even if, indeed, many Whites were not truly prejudiced against Obama, one has to remember that Obama did not get a majority of the white votes especially concerning the southern, rural, male voters as seen in the previous chapter. This demonstrates that prejudice towards colored politicians is still a

reality. Some analysts maintain that many Whites refuse to admit their racist sentiments in public. Accordingly, Governor Douglas Wilder of Virginia asserts:

Whites would not publically admit to being racist, but when the country was closed to vote, the racial baggage that had plagued this country made them question Black political power and leadership. (qtd. in Dupuis and Boeckelman 76).

Indeed, one can note that since the consensual attack against racism, it has become wrong to utter racist words or hold racist attitudes. As a result, people tend to mute their prejudice. Americans have undoubtedly become less racist, but many still hold prejudices without professing them. A significant number of sociologists and psychologists assume that many people are not even aware of their prejudice. The latter belongs to the subconscious level. Accordingly, white voters may have refused to vote for Obama seemingly for other reasons than his race; nevertheless, on the subconscious level, racial prejudice is the underlying cause. Dupuis and Boeckelman claim that: "However, the racial dynamics of political campaigning works on more subconscious levels as voters react to a candidate's race in ways in which they may not be fully aware of" (124). Thus, some voters respond unconsciously to a candidate's race and may reject him without being aware that it is for racial reasons. According to these people, black politicians are not capable of governing the country. They judge their aptitudes based on their race. To sum up, Americans pretend to have entered a post-racial era in which race does no longer matter. In addition, surveys show that race is no longer important in the choice of a candidate. Nevertheless, one can note that race is still significant in the choice of a candidate- be it as a drawback or in more rare cases as a propeller. Occurring on the conscious or subconscious levels, racial prejudice is still important in the choice of high-ranked posts or offices

such as that of president. If race indeed is still important in elections, then the American society is not ready to get rid of its race problem. Therefore, Barack Obama is left with little room to maneuver.

Arguing against the widely-held view that the election of Barack Obama was evidence of America's post-racialism, analyst Tim Wise held that the election of the first black president was only possible because Obama could trespass his skin color; in other words, he could "play white". He stated: "If whites come to like, respect, and even vote for persons of color like Barack Obama, but only because they view them as having "transcended" their blackness in some way" (9). For him, his victory is due to his capacity to make people forget his skin color and above all to reassure them. He advanced that: "[w]hat made him win is "his ability to ease white fears and transcend his still- problematic blackness" (9). Thus, one cannot deny that race still plays some role in electing a president and that blackness is still problematic to reach high offices. As a result, in order to be elected, a candidate issued from a racial minority cannot be natural; he has to "play white." This reality undeniably undermines any possible struggle against the race problem. Barack Obama had to adapt to Whites' requirements in order to win the election. The fact that he could not be totally sincere when tackling the issue of race undoubtedly determined its subsequent failure to confront the race problem.

4. Limitations on Presidential Power:

4.1. The Purposeful Slowness of the Process of Change Bringing:

Regardless of President Obama's own determination, another hurdle prevents him from being truly effective: these are the limitations on presidential power. The Founding Founders designed the American system in such a way that any initiative

faces a long and arduous road to become a law. Changing things is a painful process especially when these come from enduring traditions and beliefs. Sugrue has stressed this matter-of-fact when he referred to the expectations and frustrations of the voters who wanted change very rapidly: “This frustration may be especially bitter because voters often forget that the U.S political system is designed to frustrate, not facilitate actions” (125). On purpose, the Founding Fathers made it quite difficult to enact new laws. They designed this procedure to secure the stability of the American system. Time and consensus are necessary to introduce new legislation.

Further, in order to frustrate actions, especially hasty ones, the system of Checks and Balance makes each branch review each other in order to safeguard the spirit of the Constitution and the American ideals. Like that, presidential powers are limited. Presidential action is hindered even if it should be conceded that starting from the twentieth century, the presidential powers expanded greatly making observers refer to the phenomenon as “imperial presidency.” Indeed, the president took a more and more important role in the affairs of his country. Dangerous situations like world wars, the world economic crashes, the Cold War, the war on terror among others have led the presidents to take more and more unilateral decisions and initiatives. It is true that presidents have more and more the possibility to take initiatives during states of emergency without consulting the other branches especially Congress. Nevertheless, the issue of race relations is not part of these urgent and exceptional situations. In this field, the president’s range of action is limited. The president could issue executive orders but these are not truly effective as far as race relations are concerned. He could initiate laws, but here he had the task to convince Congress. Thus, the existing limitations to presidential power hinder presidential action especially in unpopular issues such as race relations.

4.2. Republican Congressmen's Obstructionist Strategy:

Furthermore, the task of the president is even more difficult when he has to confront a House of Representatives dominated by the opposite party. It is the case for President Obama who has to cope with a Congress dominated by the Republican Party. Automatically, this further curbs any presidential initiatives. It happens indeed that the Republican representatives refuse any proposition simply because it originates from a democrat. During his presidency, Obama faced a particularly harsh opposition on the part of Congressional Republicans who secretly agreed to block any initiative proposed by the president. This obstructionist plan was later unveiled by several journalists and political analysts such as Michael Grunwald and Robert Draper. According to the former, there existed:

a republican plot to obstruct President Obama before he ever took office, including secret meetings led by House GOP whip Eric Cantor in Dec. 2008 and Senate minority leader Mitch Mc Connell in which they laid out their daring no honeymoon strategy of all-out resistance to a popular president during an economy emergency. (Grunwald)

This was confirmed by the reported sayings of Republican Congressman. For instance, Keven Mc Carthy stated: "We've gotta challenge them on every single bill and challenge them on every single campaign." (qtd. in Draper). Furthermore, former senator George Voinovitch summed up the republican strategy stating: "if he was for it, we had to be against it." (qtd in Draper). Therefore, Republican congressman plotted to stop any initiative presented by Obama regardless of the fact if it is a good proposition or not. This stands as a strong barrier in the president's efforts to heal the problems of the nation. Indeed, Republicans stopped him for ordinary initiatives so

one cannot imagine passing a law that would concern unpopular issues such as the racial one.

The president himself was aware about this plan. His growing frustration is visible through the following declaration: “we can’t wait for an increasingly dysfunctional Congress to do its job. Where they won’t act, I will.” (qtd. in Lowanda and Milks 3) Here, one may notice that Obama grew exasperated by the attitude of the Republican Congressmen. At the same time, he uttered his determination insisting that their obstructionism would not prevent him from taking action whenever necessary. Therefore, contrary to what may be expected, holding the highest office does not facilitate things for Barack Obama. It seems that on the contrary, the function of president prevents him from being effective in reducing racism and racial prejudice. As seen previously in other parts of this work, Barack Obama did more for the racial issue when he was a community organizer in Chicago and a senator than while holding the highest office.

4.3. States’ Rights Provision as a Further Obstacle to Presidential Action:

The extent of rights that the federal government should grant to the states has been one of the enduring debates in American politics. The Constitution has attempted to protect the rights of the states; but its vagueness has left much room for the states to maneuver. In regards to the subsequent events, i. e.: the Civil War and the potential end of the United States of America, one can judge this freedom as excessive. Throughout history, periods in which the states or the federal government gained ground alternated. Recently, the states’ power has been increasing. Historically, some states have resisted federal decisions and laws, passing local laws trespassing directly or more subtly the federal ones. One field in which states have

resisted federal laws is civil rights. Indeed, some states have more or less directly infringed rights that the federal government granted at the federal level. Taking the example of the right to vote here would be judicial. Barack Obama was aware of the fact that some states perpetuated racial discrimination. At a White House commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, he stated, “In theory, everybody’s in favor of the right to vote; in practice, we have state legislatures that are deliberately trying to make it harder for people to vote” (White House). Here, the president wanted to shed light on the violation of the Voting Rights Act by some state legislatures. As *New York Times* journalist Julie Davis pointed out, through these comments, the president reacted to the Texas legislature passing a discriminatory voter identification law, hereby violating the Voting Act. How was such violation possible when the federal government is supposed to act as a check to state abuse? This relative powerlessness of the federal government originates from a 2013 Supreme Court decision as the same journalist explained:

The case is regarded as an important marker for defining the reach of the law after a 2013 Supreme Court decision that struck down its most powerful enforcement tool_ a requirement that states with histories of racial discrimination, including many in the South, win approval from the federal government before changing their election laws. (Hirshfeld Davis)

After this Supreme Court decision, the federal government had to act after the enactment of laws; i.e.: after the state legislatures pass them. Thus, as in this case the states could further complicate the job of the president especially in controversial issues like racial discrimination. Former judge D’Army Bailey expressed the concern raised by some states’ infringements on civil rights. He stated: “For those of us

dedicated to the cause of civil rights, the increasingly calls for states' rights are code words for a direct attack on the progress African-Americans have made during the last fifty years" (Bailey 9). He continues warning against division: "we are as a result of this resurgence of white bigotry, in my opinion, at the greatest racial divide since the civil war." The issue of race has divided the United States in the past,

and it seems that it will continue to divide them for still an undetermined period. To sum up, state resistance is another hurdle in the struggle against racial prejudice and racism.

5. A Race- Based Opposition to President Obama's Initiatives and Policies:

Although it is impossible to evaluate the exact extent of racial prejudice in the acceptance or rejection of presidential initiatives, it is admissible that an undefined proportion of people could oppose or reject Obama's policies simply based on his race. Nevertheless, it is also true that an undefined proportion of people may support his policies simply because of his color. Accordingly, researcher Michael Tesler attempted to prove that the president's race indeed motivates some of the white people to reject his policies (690). He also demonstrated that a proportion of Blacks also tend to follow the president's policies because introduced by a black counterpart (700). This echoes some other researchers' conclusions. For instance, a group of researchers: Eric D. Knowles, Brian S. Lowery and Rebecca L. Schaumberg searched the extent of racial prejudice in opposition to Obama's policies concentrating on health care. In their paper entitled: "Racial Prejudice Predicts Opposition to Obama and his Health Care Reform Plan" (2010), they came to the conclusion that: "In sum, our data support the notion that racial prejudice is one factor driving opposition to Obama and

his policies” (420). Measuring the presence and extent of racial prejudice in American people’s reactions to a black president’s initiatives and policies, they discovered that indeed some people rejected the policies not because they were wrong, but because the man who proposed them proved to be black. Likewise, scholars Ray Hannania, Paul Krugman and Eugene Robinson also claimed that at least some of the opposition Obama’s policies encountered were due to his racial appurtenance (qtd in Tesler 690). Thus, policy-making is harder for a black president than for a white one. Regardless of the efficiency of his policies, Obama is likely to encounter opposition simply because he is black. This concerns relatively “neutral” policies i.e.: policies deprived of any racial direction. Therefore, what about overtly racially-oriented policies? Obama’s race proves indeed a serious obstacle in any attempt to fight racial prejudice and discrimination.

6. The Whites’ Denial of the Race Problem:

As seen earlier in this chapter, the race problem is an individual as well as a collective one, and it could not be addressed by one person only, be it the president of the United States of America. Each individual should provide some personal efforts. The problem is that in the United States, the majority of the population is still reluctant to provide this effort. Even worse is the fact that a great proportion of the population denies purely the existence of the problem. One should note that whenever possible, Obama does remind the American society of the continuance of the race problem. He appealed to the acknowledgement of the problem. For instance, in the “More Perfect Union Speech” delivered 18 March 2008 during the first presidential campaign, he eloquently evoked the issue:

Race is an issue this nation cannot afford to ignore right now. (...) the path to a more perfect union demands that white Americans acknowledge that what ails the Afro-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people, that the legacy of discrimination and current incidents of discrimination while less overt than in the past- are real and must be addressed. (*In his Own Words* 66-70)

This is a powerful appeal to deny post-racialism. He urged people to acknowledge the perpetuation of the race problem and to understand the legitimacy of the African-Americans' feelings. Later, while president, he regularly takes the occasion to remind the American people of the existence of the race problem and to push them to action. The continuance of the race problem is a reality that no one can reasonably deny as numerous analysts remarked. Wise stated:

For while the individual success of persons of color, as with Obama, is meaningful (...), the larger systemic and institutional realities of life in America suggest the ongoing salience of a deep-seated cultural malady- racism- which has been neither eradicated nor even substantially diminished by Obama's victory. (8)

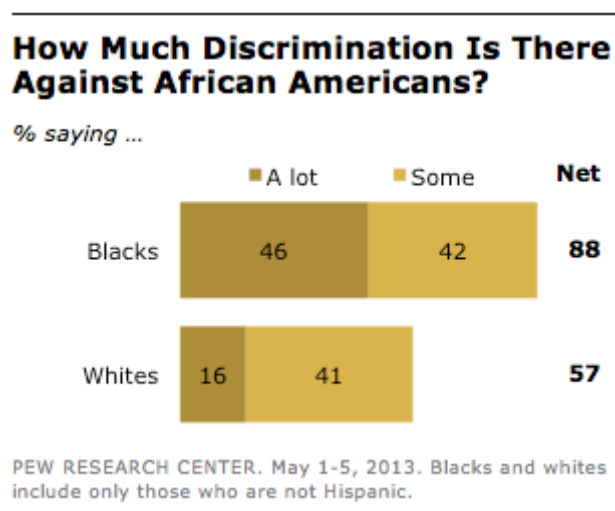
Similarly, Hill warned against this illusion. He pointed out: "Americans and the world must not be misled into thinking that somehow the Obama presidency diminishes or removes the sting of racism that continues to rage on in America" (38). Thus, many individuals, including the president, are conscious of the perpetuation of the race problem and are warning people against denying this reality. Still, many American people, especially Whites deny such a reality. How can you solve a problem if you deny its existence?

7. The Discrepancy between Blacks' and Whites' View of Race

Relations:

Furthermore, one could notice a discrepancy between Whites and racial minorities in the perception of the race problem. Indeed, there are substantial disparities in the way the different racial groups perceive the extent of the remaining racial prejudice and discrimination. They similarly differ in their description of the state of race relations. Sometimes, the gap is so huge that it does raise questions on how it is possible for people living in the same nation to interpret the same reality in such a different light. Generally, Whites perceive less racial prejudice and discrimination and are more optimistic about race relations while Blacks see the same picture on a much darker light still highlighting the significant amount of racial prejudice and discrimination. Moreover, they also look at race relations on a more pessimistic lens. First, on the extent of existing racial discrimination against Blacks, the two main “racial” groups disagree sharply. Table 16 sheds light on this discrepancy.

Table 16: Discrimination against African-Americans:



Source: Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/28/for-african-americans-discrimination-is-not-dead/>

Through this diagram, one can highlight two significant points. First, Blacks and Whites disagree on the extent of racial discrimination. Second, they disagree on its degree. Concerning the extent, 88% of Blacks but only 57% of Whites confirm that at least some discrimination exists. Among these, 46% of Blacks say that there is a lot of discrimination while only 16% for the Whites. The difference of perception is worth noting here. Surprisingly, about the same percentage of individuals from the two groups (42% of Blacks and 41% of Whites) agree that there is “some” discrimination. Thus, the two groups contrast in the extent of the remaining racial discrimination in a striking manner. Indeed, 30% more of black people than of white people perceive the great amount of discrimination. One may explain this disparity by the fact that by experiencing that discrimination, the black people are more aware of its existence. Moreover, Table 17 displays the persisting racial disagreement over the treatment received by the Blacks in different situations. The discrepancy between the Whites and the Blacks is still sharp. Here, a third distinct group appears: the Hispanics. This group stands generally in-between in terms of percentage but is closer to the blacks’ perception. The numbers obtained represent the percentage of people saying, “Blacks in their community are treated less fairly than Whites.” For instance, as much as 70% of Blacks point out at the unequal treatment in dealing with the police while only 37% of Whites and 51% of Hispanics agree. In the courts as well, the disparity is enormous with 68% of Blacks and 27% of Whites highlighting the racial discrimination in this field. Nevertheless, the discrepancy diminishes slightly for the other sectors with a difference of about 30% between the two groups. Apart

from this disparity, one should point out another interesting point. Indeed, Whites are more likely to acknowledge the unequal treatment of Blacks in some fields more than the others are. This is the case for “in dealing with the police” as well as “in the courts.” Therefore, Whites are more aware of the reality of racial discrimination in the law enforcement and the judicial system. Concerning the other sectors, just a minority of Whites acknowledges the persisting racial discrimination. Fewer Blacks also point out at the unequal treatment in the rest of the fields as visible in Table 17.

Table 17: Wide Racial Divides Persist over Fair Treatment of Blacks:

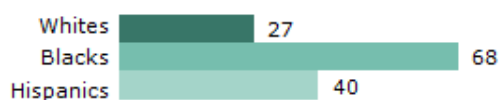
Wide Racial Divides Persist over Fair Treatment of Blacks

% saying blacks in their community are treated less fairly than whites ...

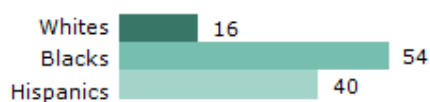
In dealing with the police



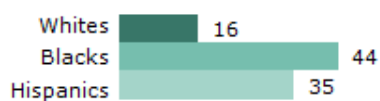
In the courts



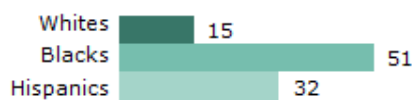
On the job or at work



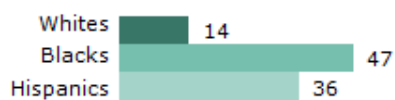
In stores or restaurants



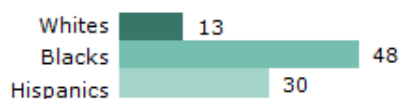
In local public schools



In getting health care



When voting in elections



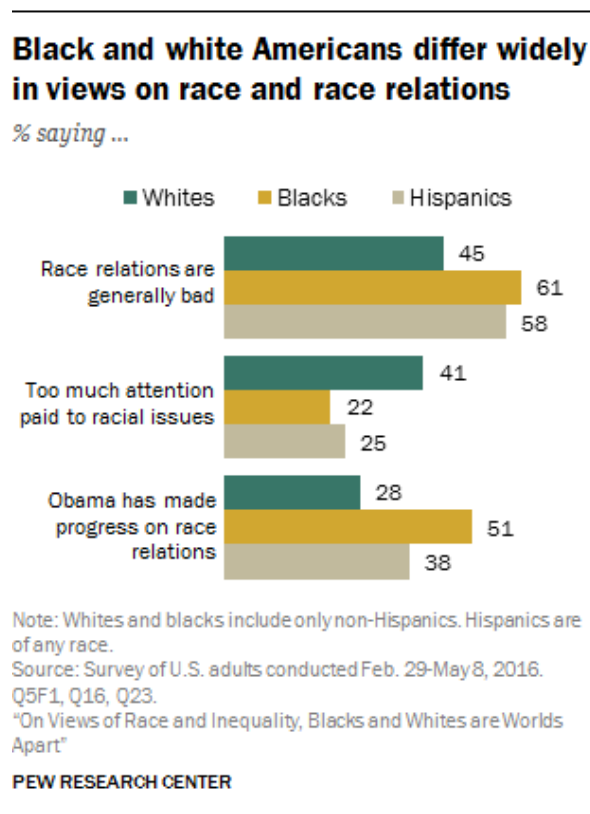
Note: Blacks and whites include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics may be of any race. For whites, n=1,471; for blacks, n=376; for Hispanics, n=218.

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Moreover, the racial “groups” differ also in their view on the racial issue and on race relations in general. The Pew Research Center conducted a research from February to May 2016 asking respondents to highlight their agreement with three

important statements. The results appear on Table 18. To the statement, “race relations are generally bad,” 45% of Whites, 61% of Blacks and 58% of Hispanics, agreed. Here is noticed a disparity between Whites on the one hand and Blacks and Hispanics on the other hand. First, a majority of Blacks and Hispanics agreed but it is worth noting that almost half the Whites thought so. Thus, the gap is not so wide. Next, to the statement “too much attention paid to racial issues,” 41% of Whites, 22% of Blacks and 25% of Hispanics acquiesced. In this case, the difference between the groups is more noticeable. Therefore, for the two minorities, the attention given to the racial issues is insufficient. Finally, the last statement is about the achievements of the president on race relations. To the statement “Obama has made progress on race relations”, slightly more than half the Blacks agreed, while only 38% of Hispanics and 28% of Whites thought so. Two important points are worth mentioning here. First, the Whites and Blacks disagreed largely on this point and second, contrarily to the other statements, Hispanics are closer to the Whites’ perception than the Blacks’ one. To conclude on this point, one can state that there is no consensus on the perception of race and race relations among the three main “racial” groups. This stands as a further hurdle in the way of the president to fight racial prejudice.

Table 18: Black- white Disparity on Views of Race Relations

One important remark that this study could induce is that it is surprising how people living in the same place could perceive the same reality in such different ways. This discrepancy stands as a strong barrier that further hindered the president's struggle against racial prejudice. Indeed, when the white majority, which is responsible for the persistence of the race problem, does not realize its extent or feign to ignore it, then the success of the fight is largely jeopardized.

Conclusion:

The election of the first African-American president raised high expectations for the race problem and race relations in general. In view of his mitigated record in the racial issue, it proved judicial to analyze the reasons in order to assess the personal responsibility of Barack Obama in the continuity of racial prejudice. Undeniably, he

has some responsibility in the persistence of racial prejudice in regards to his self-presentation as a post-racial candidate, his insufficient efforts, his awkward handling of some cases implying black and white individuals. Nevertheless, the factors independent to Obama seem to be solid if not, insuperable obstacles in the way of the president. Indeed, the president has confronted strong hurdles in his way to address the race problem. The nature of the task, the complexity of the race problem, the limitations on presidential power, the fact of race being taboo in American politics, racial prejudice towards the president, Whites' denial and the discrepancy between Whites' and Blacks' views of the issue undermine seriously the chances for Obama to reduce racial prejudice whatever strong may be his determination. Even if the task is difficult for any president, one could reasonably advance that a white-skinned one would have encountered less adversity.

General Conclusion

At the onset of American existence, religious, ethnic and economic considerations determined American people's self-identification as well as their social interactions. It is worth noting that race did not determine an individual's status or value in early colonial times. In fact, the concept of race as we know it nowadays appeared later. People used other criteria to classify themselves and the others. With time, race rose as a powerful notion in the American experience. At the beginning, race had a biological definition. Based on skin color and other phenotypical traits such as the texture of the hair, the body shape and others, individuals were classified into different categories. The problem was that the scientific community did not contend itself with classifying people only but some scientists started to rank these categories. Accordingly, the white race stood at the top of that ranking, the black one at the bottom, while the other races occupied in-between positions.

Several inconstancies rapidly rose with this racial classification due to its reliance on physical features that were highly unreliable criteria. Though illogical and inconsistent, racial classification became scientifically valid and the white majority adopted almost universally this classification in order to impose its supremacy. Race as a biological construct deeply ingrained in the American psyche. A majority of people sanctioned the racial spectrum with Whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom.

The other “races” such as Indians, Asians and Latinos were placed somewhere in-between in this spectrum. Since lacking scientific rigor, this categorization changed along political and economic factors. In order to preserve the supremacy of the white race, the latter designed discriminatory practices to keep the racial minorities in an inferior position. Slavery and segregation imprisoned Blacks into an everlasting state of inferiority. Racial minorities in general did not enjoy the same rights and opportunities as the white majority. Overt and socially sanctioned at first, racist attitudes and practices have prevailed until the twentieth century.

That century represents a turning point in the existence of racism. Indeed, a combination of factors led to a certain decline of racial prejudice. Two factors proved nevertheless crucial: the scientific demise of the notion of race but most importantly the emergence of the United States as the leader of the democratic world, which would bring the contradictory attitude of the United States to light. Its promotion of equality and freedom internationally could not coexist with a tradition of racial segregation and oppression at home. The minorities’ own struggle for equality further helped bringing about change. As the fruit of a consensus among the population and the federal government of the United States, a series of laws came to outlaw racial discrimination and to redress past inequities.

With the outlawing of racial discrimination, racial prejudice also declined. The lot of the minorities improved. However, racial inequalities persisted. Some sociologists and other analysts pointed out at the contradiction between the general commitment to racial equality and the enduring racial inequality. After a steady shrinking in the gap between the white majority and the racial minorities in the years following the Civil Rights Movement, it is now stagnating. A certain number of sociologists explained this reality by the development of more covert, subtler ways of

discriminating against the racial minorities. Racial discrimination is now illegal but racial prejudice is much more difficult to eradicate. Racist acts were publically condemned. Nevertheless, the mentalities were more difficult to change. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, individuals or institutions perpetuated racial discrimination, finding subtler ways to ensure the supremacy of the white “race”. Consequently, the general movement towards racial equality as well as the relative improvement of the conditions of racial minorities misled people into interpreting these as indications of the near-end of racism.

As a result, many wrongly believed that the United States finally entered a post-racial era in which race did no longer matter. The rapid ascension of the African-American political figure Barack Hussein Obama confirmed this widespread belief. This Illinois Senator subsequently engaged in the presidential race. Under numerous aspects, Obama’s candidacy embodied this belief that the US was becoming racially equalitarian. In terms of his racial appurtenance as well as his exceptional background, many Americans viewed Barack Obama as the savior who would purge America of its original sin. Backed by a majority of the American population, among them a substantial percentage of white voters, Barack Obama finally became the first African-American to become president of the United States. The enormous task of making the United States truly color-blind fell upon his shoulders.

During his two campaigns, he carefully avoided referring to the race issue. He addressed the issue only when asked about it. Throughout this research, one could conclude that this attitude did not reflect carelessness on the part of the candidate, for Barack Obama is highly conscious of the race problem. This was nothing more than a political strategy. He adopted this strategy to avoid public opinion to label him as the leader of the black community exclusively. In this case, the American electorate

would have believed that he represented only the black community and would defend the interests of the black people only. This would have cost him the election for a second term. Thus, he preferred to avoid focusing on the racial issue to make the American electorate in general and the white voters in particular realize that he would be the representative of all Americans. Undoubtedly, if Barack Obama posed himself as the leader of the black community and if he gave the impression that he would focus only on racism, the American electorate at large would not have identified with him.

This work emphasized the exceptionality of the new president. First, his identity is uncommon. He is a bi-racial issued from a union between a Kenyan student and a white woman. He is African-American but unlike the overwhelming majority, he did not descend from slave ancestors. He was the son of an African intellectual residing temporarily in the United States thanks to a scholarship. Besides, he has grown up with white people, his mother and maternal grandparents, and received the major part of his education from them. In addition, his residential moves to Hawaii and to Indonesia gave him a unique experience of racial consciousness. Moreover, his personality is also outstanding: he is smart, witty, calm and open-minded. He is also honest, generous, sociable and receptive to people's needs. Furthermore, his education and his career as a community organizer further confirm him as the ideal person to confront the race problem.

After his election, he sought to emphasize the unity of the American people through his speeches. He constantly repeated that he was the president of all Americans. Reasserting such belief would prevent the American people from believing that he was representing solely the African-American community. The alienation of a part of the electorate would have undermined the popular support of

policies he would have proposed. Thus, he had to walk on eggs as far as the racial issue is concerned. He could not stress the racial issue in order not to alienate the white voters; at the same time, he could not ignore it because he could not betray the expectations of the black community and the other racial minorities. He had little room for maneuvering. Therefore, the wisest attitude he adopted was to reassert the unity of the Americans and to present himself as the president of all Americans.

Even after his election, Barack Obama could not focus on the racial issue. He certainly addressed the issue but he chose to do so in an indirect way. He decided to deal with the issues in which the racial minorities were the most disadvantaged such as education and health care. In other words, he sought to alleviate the remaining racial disparities in major fields without targeting explicitly the racial minorities. In fact, numerous studies have shown that the white majority tended to reject explicit racial policies; i.e.: policies targeting directly racial minorities. Its harsh opposition to affirmative action reflected that attitude. Thus, Barack Obama sought to improve the lot of the minorities by introducing reforms in the fields most touched by racial disparities. Initiated by the president and introduced in 2010, Obamacare extended health care to the poorest sections of the American population. Without being explicitly racial, this reform benefited greatly the African-Americans and other racial minorities. In addition, other laws as well as executive orders came to improve somehow the lot of the racial minorities.

Despite outstanding personal qualities and background as well as a lucid view of the race problem, Barack Obama could obtain only mitigated results. Some observers advanced that the president even degraded race relations. One should concede first that when simply examining his agenda, Barack Obama did not make of the racial problem one of his priorities and thus did not provide many efforts to reduce

racial prejudice. He even presented himself as a post-racial candidate. In addition, he had awkward reactions in incidents involving black protagonists thereby deteriorating the already fragile relations between the white and the black communities.

Nevertheless, he had little room to maneuver. Presenting himself as the candidate of the black community would have surely cost him his re-election. Championing overtly racial issues would have raised antagonisms against him since race became a taboo in American politics.

Seemingly, insuperable obstacles stand in the way of the elimination of racial prejudice. These are obstacles on which the power of the president has little incidence. First, the nature of the task and the high complexity of the problem undermine the struggle against racial prejudice. Indeed, one can legislate on people's actions but not on people's mentalities. Racial prejudice is deeply rooted in the American psyche. In addition, it had become sometimes unconscious for many people. People may not even be aware of their prejudice. In case, they are conscious of it, it is very difficult to eliminate it. Thus, the task itself is almost impossible. Furthermore, because of the illusion of colour-blindness, it has become very tricky for any politician even more for a black politician to tackle the issue of racial prejudice. In addition, the racial groups in general do not agree on the extent of the problem. The Whites underestimate the persistence of the problem. They deny the continuance of racial discrimination. Likewise, the white population resists any racial policy that would redress the remaining racial disparities. To further add to the general complexity of the problem, the racial minorities themselves prove to be prejudiced, so how can they blame the white majority for a defect that they themselves hold? In addition to that, Barack Obama surely faced a race-based opposition to his policies and for a large part of his presidency a Congress dominated by Republicans. Thus, despite all the efforts he

could have provided, it was quite impossible for the president to make any significant improvement in the struggle against racial prejudice. Nevertheless, one should not overlook his personal responsibility; yet, one should nuance it.

Finally, this thesis draws the following conclusions. First, Barack Obama's election to the presidency does not reflect the alleged post-racialism of the American society since racial prejudice still exists. Second, it is undeniable that this African-American president represents the ideal person to confront the race problem in view of his personality, his bi-racial identity, his experiences, his intelligence and open-mindedness. Third, this work highlighted that despite this exceptionality, Obama's achievements in the racial sphere were disappointing. This thesis also acknowledges the efforts done by the president but also points out at his defects and wrong actions that undermined further progress in the struggle against racial prejudice. Nevertheless, this work comes to the conclusion that despite a certain personal responsibility, the task itself was impossible.

At the end of his second term, Barack Obama summed up the contribution of his presidency to the struggle against racial prejudice by saying that it changed the young people's perception of race. Young people do not view race as their elders; they seem to be more tolerant and this represents hope for the future of the race problem in America. One should moderate this hope at least for the near future with the election of his successor Donald J. Trump who seemingly is not going to improve anything in the matter (quite the contrary). It is going to be a long, arduous road before racial prejudice could disappear from the American mentalities, if its elimination is ever possible.

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