

FINDING THE FOURTH LOCALE:
DICHOTOMY CHALLENGES IN THE RHETORIC OF BARACK OBAMA

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I dedicate this thesis to my departed ancestors, to my grandmother Beatrice Telegen and niece Ella Marjorie Safferstone. May this work encourage multi-generational dialogue in the future.

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ABSTRACT

FINDING THE FOURTH LOCALE: DICHOTOMY CHALLENGES IN THE
RHETORIC OF BARACK OBAMA

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The historic election of Barack Obama as President of the United States in 2008 has attracted much interest in the humanities. The narrower lens of rhetorical analysis has yet to explore one of Obama's most notable inclinations, namely his tendency to challenge existing, binary-based conceptualizations in America's political climate. Rhetorical scholar Joseph Telegen will explore the manner through which this effective communicator complicates existing dichotomies, observing that the now-President never attempts to negate these dualisms, even when questioning their simplicities.

Through detailed scrutiny of three "Obama Texts" (the speeches entitled "Out of Many, One" and "A More Perfect Union" and the memoir *Dreams from My Father*), Telegen will show the means through which Obama "maintains and improves" (to use Wayne Booth's term) these polarized understandings. Through three discernible methods, The Alteration Technique, The Vision Technique, and The Empathy Technique, the rhetor complicates an existing binary, prior to the arrival upon a nuanced position that embraces neither polarity and refuses to settle for a banal 50-50 compromise between the two extremes. This rhetorical arrival is (what Telegen calls) a "Fourth Locale."

This writing will also discuss scenarios in which these Techniques "play out": Barack Obama's misrepresented exchange with "Joe the Plumber," the website that has,

to an extent, mass-marketed the concept of “community organizer” (which *Dreams from My Father* gave visibility), and the recent challenge of the Health Care Reform bill. Also included will be a proposed rekindling of the deeply controversial Ebonics debate. These will all be included in order to connect Obama’s rhetoric to situations in which his strategies were (or could be) applied.

Theoretical connections will also be made, most frequently to Wayne Booth’s *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, which, Telegen will argue, finds its edicts satisfactorily applied in Obama’s language approaches. It is hoped that this thesis will reveal the importance of “Finding a Fourth Locale” as a means of promoting dialogues which both arrive upon “warrantable” positions and open the door to subsequent, open dialogues. Obama’s rhetoric can be credited as promoting such discourse, and thus can be seen as highly constructive.

INTRODUCTION: “MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT” OF DICHOTOMY-
BASED DISCOURSE IN THE RHETORIC OF BARACK OBAMA

On February 6th, 2010, Resigned Governor Sarah Palin employed a crowd-pleasing dichotomy when she took a swipe at presidential intelligence, presently embodied by Barack Obama. She did so in front of a “Tea Party” crowd in Nashville, Tennessee. Reinforcing her audience’s distaste for the mere concept of legal rights for non-citizens accused of terrorist activity, Palin proclaimed: “We need a Commander-in-Chief, not a Professor of Law standing at the lectern” (a reference to Obama’s apparently undesirable expertise on constitutional law). This remark was met with chilling applause by an audience seemingly thrilled to accept woefully-flawed logic.¹

The rhetoric mentioned above introduces this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, it serves as an example of the dangerously-drawn dichotomies present in modern American political discourse. The overt division between “Military Commander” and “Intellectual” indicates the impossibility of an overlap of any sort between the two. Moreover, there are (arguably) more intellectually vacant, implicit arguments contained within this separation: Some people are too smart to be strong leaders, and the law should be malleable in the service of more important, militaristic goals.² This thesis will oppose such commentary, indirectly, by discussing Obama’s rhetoric and its alternative implementation of dichotomies. The desired aim will be, rather than lauding the President or trashing his adversaries, to demonstrate that Obama’s texts strive for complexity, as well as encouraging the future expression of various, “warrantable”³ positions, the latter adjective defined in Wayne Booth’s *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, which I have chosen as the theoretical anchor for my exploration.

Returning to Mrs. Palin's nuance-neutering comment, it is also important to note that her audience here is, by its own admission, a group which prides itself on embracing polarization, partly as a product of anti-Washingtonian sentiment, but partly, also, as a result of the rhetorical legacy of the second Bush administration.⁴ Kenneth Burke asserts in *Language as Symbolic Action* that all rhetorical choices contribute to future determinations of reality, while reflecting the realities from which they originated (1341). I assert, therefore, that prior dichotomy-driven rhetoric is partly responsible for the realities of the political climate which, in turn, generated the possibility of Palin's language choice, a binary which qualifies as "quasi-creative" because it arrives upon a newly-oppositional space (I believe no one has ever made a pronouncement that combines ludicrousness and the specific comparison found here), though it borrows heavily from past, easier-to-believe polarizations.

Of course, no individual's rhetoric has been more responsible for the reemergence of such an environment than Barack Obama's immediate predecessor, George W. Bush. One notable example of Bush's political landscape-altering rhetoric is found in a 2003 speech in which the speaker casts the "War on Terror," blatantly, as "a conflict between good and evil." This speech concludes with Bush's now infamous remark that, in this conflict, "either you're with us or against us. Either you're on the side of freedom and justice or you're not." The ramifications of these two dichotomies (Good/Evil; With/Against) are clear; Bush wishes to cast those who object to his administration's policies as a distinct part of the "Evil." Naturally, this binary approach is no more intellectually responsible than the vapid claim that a (former) law professor cannot be an effective Commander-in-Chief. Restating, however, it is my argument that Bush's

rhetoric has contributed to the climate which enabled a comment like Palin's to be acceptably constructed.

It is critical, therefore, to draw a contrast between Bush's polarization-based, polarization-inspiring rhetoric and that of Barack Obama, Bush and Palin's rhetorical contemporary. Functioning in the aftermath of Bush's discourses, now-President Obama's rhetorical strategies have served as a stark contrast with regard to the utilization of dichotomies. Consider, for instance, the way Obama addressed the matter of opposition to Bush's war in his breakthrough oratorical performance at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, a speech entitled "Out of Many, One." Obama remarks in this text that "there are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq, and patriots who supported the war in Iraq." The conclusions we can draw from this comment are multi-faceted. Not only does Obama's text refuse Bush's obvious aforementioned implication (that failure to support the war in Iraq represents an embrace of the terrorists' "Pure Evil"), it expands this dismissal into an assertion that "patriotism" (a signifier that garnered much attention after September 11th) is in no way determined by support for the Bush administration's war.

It is, finally, important to note that the language of this quote does not *exclude* the possibility of unpatriotic behavior on the part of an individual opposed to Bush's policies (or, for that matter, an individual supporting them). The language, instead, merely stresses the *existence* of patriotism on both sides of the debate, thus negating the absolutist nature of Bush's comment without a complete nullification of the binary concept. This is a constant aspect of Obama's rhetoric; his strategies are designed to negate the simplicity of existent dichotomies, rather than affecting the erasure of the

dichotomy itself. This strategic component results in the furthered opening of dialogue, as the dichotomies and assumptions behind previous rhetorical simplicities remain available for use, but are complexified in order to discourage premature conclusions.

A position, however, is always *eventually* reached in Obama's discourse. The rhetor carefully addresses both extremities and then arrives upon an endpoint satisfactory to his understanding, one that always avoids a nullifying middle position between the two polarities and enables future dialogues. I have labeled this process as the arrival upon a "Fourth Locale," the function of which I can clarify through the inclusion of three past commentaries. David Frank's understanding of Obama's intent is that of "a universalism of consilience; namely, that different political and theological perspectives can 'jump together' toward shared principles" (177); my addition is that specific-though not terminal-political positions are "jumped" to in these texts. By not oversimplifying while concluding, however, Obama nurtures, as Wayne Booth puts it, "a grounds for confidence in a multiplicity of ways of knowing" (99). Actually, Joan Alway, describing Jürgen Habermas's view of student activism (an obviously separate realm of discourse from Presidential oratory) comes closest to articulating precisely what "The Fourth Locale" does to encourage this "multiplicity." A user of this process can: "create, protect, or expand space for a plurality of life forms, all the while acknowledging the need for, and allowing for the continuing function of, the economic and administrative systems" (121). Obama's positions are, as Alway puts it, "self-limiting" (122), as no politician can avoid logocentrism completely. By (at least partially) validating a range of alternative understandings, however, he increases the likelihood that his audiences will continue the conversations he has started.

The sophistication of Obama's dialogue-opening approach to dichotomy has not been unproblematic. Whether right-wing scholarship such as Liam Julian's, accusing Obama of "empty sentences" (53) disguising an extreme left-wing agenda or left-wing arguments accusing Obama of upholding the status quo via "language consistent with the dominant racial frames" (Harlow 171), the crux of numerous arguments remains the same: This language, because of its complexity, betrays the potential for an ineffectual or harmful presidency. The textual refusal of simplification is construed as a refusal of commitment to anything (or, at least, "anything good"⁵).

"The Muddled Selling of the President," an analysis of Obama's first year in office found in the *New York Times*, opts for dramatic oversimplification of Obama's rhetoric at its onset, ironically in an article dedicated to discussing how the President "eludes simple labels" (WK 1). Author Richard Stevenson describes Obama as a contradictory figure: "antiwar except for the one he's escalating," "liberal, except when he's not," and "cool, except when he's fighting hot" (WK 1). Stevenson, by design, avoids actual citation of Obama's texts and behavior in order to make these assertions (a wise move, because Obama's texts demonstrate that none of the labels are accurate⁶). Stevenson ultimately recognizes Obama's "ideological eclecticism" (WK 1), but fails to recognize that this complexity comes not from the contradictions he observes via overly simplistic adjectives, but rather through a refusal to be bound by the constraints of these terms.

A further problem is present in Stevenson's analysis. He cites "a political and media culture that demands simple themes and promotes conflict," not recognizing that he is a contributor to this unpleasant cultural tendency as a consequence of insisting upon

a binary-based analysis of Obama (who is and must be *either* one thing *or* the other at all times, distinguishing himself, supposedly, from Bush, who, we can imply from Stevenson, always presented himself as *one* thing). This brings me to another point with respect to why analysis of Barack Obama's rhetorical approach to dichotomies is worthwhile; it is not only the dichotomies offered by his political contemporaries that he challenges, complicating yet not rejecting, but popular culture on the whole, including the dichotomies constructed by those less-than-half-heartedly attempting to understand *him*. Those who have analyzed him, up until this point, have, by and large, considered his nuances to be a consequence of his tendency to vacillate, fully, back and forth between polarities, rather than his effort to alter the polarities of American political discourse themselves, while leaving them available in both past and present form for rhetors of the future. In this regard, Obama's approach can be linked to the new rhetoric called for in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*.

Here, Booth is selected for two reasons: Firstly, like Obama's rhetoric, the language of Booth's texts is geared toward the embrace of a discursive community that "begins with assent" (201), therefore assuming a default belief in a particular position's validity and placing the burden of (dis)proof on those aiming to invalidate the position. Booth's position here ties in with Obama's desire to eliminate absolutism *without* invalidating the smaller intellectual components with which absolutisms are developed, such as the above patriotism example. Secondly, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* contains the following remark in its conclusion: "It is always good to maintain and improve the quality of our symbolic exchange with our fellow 'selves' -to sharpen our symbolic powers so that we can understand and be understood, 'taking in' other selves

and thus expanding our own” (202-03). This belief of Booth’s, that it requires both the *maintenance* and *improvement* of rhetorical situations in order to affect self-improvement, is the key to understanding the virtue of Obama’s texts as valuable tools of “symbolic exchange” in themselves; they perform precisely this function while also, depending upon one’s perspective, enabling others to improve *their* understandings. Focusing on this aspect of his work takes “Obama Scholarship” in a new direction, as past scholarship has had other motivations.

These paths generally discuss the potential impact of “The Rhetoric of Barack Obama” on various incarnations of government policy and/or its possible social consequences.⁷ The explicit content of Obama’s texts, from which I intend to draw my observations with respect to his dichotomy-challenging, is generally downplayed in these writings. A smaller grouping of commentaries, which includes works by known rhetoricians such as Robert Ivie (in a joint paper with Oscar Giner), are concerned with the “mythos” (360) of Obama’s rise to the presidency. To clarify and summarize, these pieces describe Obama’s rhetoric in connection to an *event* (or events) during his ascent to the presidency, rather than a continuous scrutiny of the texts themselves.⁸ A final, smaller still, category of scholarship, mostly found in journals from the interdisciplinary field of rhetorical studies, primarily focuses itself on actual “Obama Texts,” as will this thesis, though even these academic commentaries remain distinguishable from mine.

David Frank’s commentary on Obama’s “A More Perfect Union” speech, in which the now-President responded to the controversy over inflammatory remarks from his Reverend, Jeremiah Wright, is an example of such an article.⁹ Frank’s discussion,

while textually-based like mine, focuses on tying Obama's oration to "the prophetic tradition" (170), arguing that, through his rhetoric, "Obama has reworl6

ked both the prophetic and his Christian faith traditions to unveil the spiritual underpinning they share" (170). Frank's discourse focuses largely upon understanding Obama's language itself, as do the other existing texts that most closely resemble the approach of this commentary. However, extensive research leads me to the conclusion that, at present, there is no existent analysis of any of Obama's texts which share the premise and resultant direction of my thesis, the premise being that Obama's approach to dichotomies is geared toward a *challenge* to existent dichotomies, in addition to a particular rhetorical path, and the ensuing consequence will be to encourage that the methodology of these texts be employed outside of their unique contexts, "pushing outward" toward application in alternate situations. This, of course, necessitates focusing on a *means* rather than an *ends* with regard to a rhetorical situation, as Booth's *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* indicates as its closing purpose. It is perhaps his lack of specific *ends*-related intent that has caused this book to be rarely employed in politically-linked academic scholarship.

The few past commentaries on Booth-in relation to political discussions-are not geared toward a "Boothian understanding" of a particular set of texts. Shawn Batt, for instance, addresses instead the issue of educational reform using Booth's "ethical criticism" among other methods of judgment. Katherine Wrightson's article, meanwhile, focuses on the moral component of education at Booth's home institution (the University of Chicago). This may, therefore, represent the first analysis of a political figure that evaluates his/her compliance with the rhetorical theories of Wayne Booth.

The Booth-accordant manner with which Obama complicates existent dichotomies will be discussed under three headings (each of which will constitute a chapter within this writing). They will carry labels I have coined during my evaluation of Obama's spoken and written texts: The Alteration Technique, The Vision Technique, and The Empathy Technique.

The Alteration Technique can be described as follows: The rhetor seizes a particular binary and "transforms" it. Such transformations occur in various ways. We see, for instance, complications of divisive rhetorical concepts (such as "Red State/Blue State" in "Out of Many, One") as Obama demonstrates the concept's limitations, transformations of an individual dichotomy's understanding through a textual shift (as in the case of Obama's shifts from first, to second, to third person {collective concerns} in "Out of Many, One"), and the use of qualifiers to alter the impact of a particular dualistic term (as in the case of Obama's linking "blind" to "optimism" in order to mitigate the speech's pathos in "Out of Many, One"). As indicated above, such forms of "Alteration" do not result in the dichotomy's eradication; instead the prior understanding receives scrutiny, its discursive examiner using it toward arrival at a particular position within the binary's spectrum. "Out of Many, One" serves as the ultimate example of this approach in action, as Obama sharpens numerous dichotomies in this text. Its text will be explicated, with multiple examples of The Alteration Technique offered both from it and two other "Obama Texts."

The Vision Technique, meanwhile, continuously features the rhetor's efforts to share experiences with others. The individual (or individuals) become representatives of particular collectives, a sub-culture soon expanded to a broader collective. We may refer

to this as the strategic pairing of two binaries: Obama/Micro-Collective and Micro-Collective/Macro-Collective. By doing so, Obama applies this pair of dichotomies to his own experience, repeatedly demonstrating that his unique autobiography (unique, at least, for a public figure of his stature) can also qualify as universal, relatable to the “Black Experience,” the grand narrative of “Anytown, America,” or, on occasion, an even larger, global universality. This is particularly prevalent in *Dreams from My Father*, Obama’s memoir, which features various imaginative exercises on the part of his *Bildungsroman*’s narrator, in which the protagonist attempts to “get into the head” of the book’s other characters, connectable to various human communities. The result is a commentary broadly themed to be relatable to the entirety of its readership; the narrative form eventually becomes, literally, “The Genesis of Barack Obama” (and, by extension, the genesis of his political philosophies). This memoir will be detailed in my chapter on The Vision Technique, along with numerous examples from it and the other two “Obama Texts” I am employing. By moving from his individual circumstances to narrow social considerations, and then to the universal, this concrete, individual experience becomes a dream-like expression of a nuanced collective understanding. Thus, two dichotomies are reestablished, still existent, but with increased complexity.

Notably, Ronald Reagan, whose election to the White House represented a similarly dramatic shift in the American political landscape, also used *a* vision technique of sorts. As detailed by William Lewis in “Narrative Form and the Reagan Presidency,” Reagan depended upon two primary forms of storytelling, critical to his rhetoric because, as Lewis puts it, “Reagan’s message *is* a story” (264). These two forms are, Lewis posits, the anecdote and the myth. While both of these story types are used by Obama in his

various texts as well, it is my argument that his Vision Technique differs from Reagan's form of visionary storytelling in that Obama is uninterested in attempting to present himself as either a "mythic hero" or as a detached narrator (Lewis 267). Instead, Obama prefers to paint himself as a yearning-for-truth daydreamer with a remarkable eye for detail in his consistently-designed merger of the individual experience to a collective one. The distinction between the two Presidents' "vision rhetoric" will be addressed in my chapter on Obama's Vision Technique.

We also see this end result (redefined but enduring rhetorical dichotomy) within The Empathy Technique, obviously present in Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech, which will be discussed at length in Chapter Three. With this approach, the rhetoric of Obama expresses empathy toward a particular Either/Or brand of thinking, while notably refraining from a complete embrace of this conception. We see, here, how the texts utilize binary conceptualizations in order to establish continuous connections between the (otherwise absolutely separated) observations and the observed. This enables both the continued existence of both perspectives, and, often, a certain new shared empathy outside of the preexisting division, achieving common ground which might otherwise have been impossible in such a rhetorical situation. This said, the common ground that is achieved is a "ground" determined by Obama, consistent with his positions. Scholar Michalinos Zembylas points to the usefulness of such a rhetorical method when he states the following in "The Politics of Trauma: Empathy, Reconciliation, and Peace Education": "The willingness to feel with the Other's perspective does not imply cognitive identification with the Other's views. In other words, the idea of accepting the Other's collective narrative as legitimate does not imply agreeing with it" (216). Obama's

rhetoric takes this encouraged understanding of “the Other” a step further, as his rhetoric reveals an effort to empathize with all parties.¹⁰

I have opted to use the three texts I have mentioned because, as variant mediums, they provide evidence that “Obama Rhetoric” is broader than the more narrow concerns of “Obama Oratory” or “Obama Prose.” Moreover, there is little question of Obama’s standing as the author of these particular texts, while other rhetoric performed by the President has more ambiguously-defined authorship.¹¹

Each “Technique” chapter will include frequent mention of *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, with the significance of the connection between Obama’s strategies and the dialogues called for by Booth made explicit. There are, after all, important components of Booth’s instructive writing that apply to each of Obama’s dichotomy-related techniques. I will also step aside from my main textual readings, on occasion, to connect Obama’s Techniques to other rhetorical situations of interest. Joe the Plumber, the Obama-related *Organizing for America* website, and the current Health Care bill will each play cameos. I will then, in my conclusion, offer a more detailed, final mini-case study suggesting that the sadly absolutist rhetoric of the first public Ebonics debate could be greatly improved, if the discussion’s reintroduction included Obama’s rhetorical strategies.

In addition to Booth’s text and the previous mention of Kenneth Burke, there are numerous additional scholarly figures whose writing supports my belief in the importance of understanding the manner through which Barack Obama’s rhetoric functions as dichotomy-opener. Ann Berthoff’s “Killer Dichotomies: Reading In/Reading Out,” remarks that: “we may say ‘as different as night and day’ and know what we mean

but that dichotomy is tenuous in the real world” (14). This comment is, of course, a protest against the overall validity of binaries as an umbrella concept, but we note that Berthoff upholds the *existence* of dichotomies in her own sentence structures and thus implicitly admits their usefulness, albeit regarding them as “tenuous.” In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, meanwhile, binaries are central to Paulo Freire’s prose, (“Oppressed/Oppressor”; “Banking Model/Liberation Model”; “Teacher/Student”; “Student/Teacher”) but these central dualisms, ideally for Freire, are integrated into a “drive towards reconciliation” (72). Furthermore, in Freire’s *praxis* “The correct method lies in dialogue” (67). Shortly later in this text, the point is hammered home: “Only through communication can life hold meaning” (Freire 77). Such comments, naturally, point toward Mikhail Bakhtin’s conception of meaning as dependent on social contact. A final academic writer relevant to my discussion is cognitive scientist and reading theorist Frank Smith, who points out the human mind’s automatic inclination to both separate and combine as part of the cognitive categorization process (9). Smith’s explication lends itself to an advocacy of a rhetorical approach that both acknowledges unavoidable difference and strives to find new empathies.

The writings mentioned here will be returned to on occasion within the ensuing conversation, which now begins with Barack Obama’s discursive Alteration Technique.

CHAPTER ONE: “THE FOURTH LOCALE” IN BARACK OBAMA’S ALTERATION
TECHNIQUE

In *Dreams from My Father*, the much-maligned Reverend Jeremiah Wright provides an uplifting sermon during a period of spiritual crisis for the author, noteworthy both because it demonstrates Wright’s obvious influence on Obama’s rhetoric¹² and for the memoirist’s response (here abridged to highlight the content that is most pertinent to this chapter’s focus, The Alteration Technique). The writer recalls: “Those stories became *our* story, *my* story; Our trials and triumphs became *at once* unique and universal, black *and more than* black” (294; italics mine). Here, Obama draws three unusual semi-dichotomies: Our/My, Unique/Universal, and Black/More-Than-Black (here within “Black’s” racial context) and, in all cases, expands the typical confines in which the terminology functions, arriving upon a creative rhetorical space.

In the case of “Our story, my story,” he contrasts the “my” of himself with an “our” which he leaves open to broad interpretation. “Our,” here, can be construed as a reference to the Chicagoan/African-American/Christian community, but also as any of a number of broader ethnic/community-based groupings (including the countless churches of “ordinary black people” {294} he references), or even the entire historical collective within the Judeo-Christian tradition (given that Wright is referring to stories from the Old Testament, this option cannot be overlooked). The division, as I have demonstrated here, is quite complex.

The treatment of unique/universal, similarly, operates on an advanced level, presenting the reader with an unusual merger of two, quite oppositional adjectives. To wit, an experience need not be “universal” in order to be “not unique,” it needs only a

single additional participant. This memoir, however, insists upon the simultaneous presence of the singular *and* the universal in the “trials and tribulations” (this, of course, is a literary device and, narrowly-defined, impossible). Finally, Obama turns the typical racial dichotomy of Black/White¹³ into Black and “More than Black” (an ambiguous phrase which could refer to either various oppressed human collectives or the unified human experience), doing so in a manner which resists what we typically refer to as “middle ground.” The commentary, instead, brings us to a place more concerned with the “Black” side of the traditional dichotomy than the “White” one, while maintaining through implication the basic structure of Black/White for future discourses.

The above discussion, while it does not jell precisely with the stylistic variations I will discuss in relation to Obama’s Alteration Technique, demonstrates the frequency with which this rhetor interrogates, and then alters, dichotomies in a limited space of text. It would be, in fact, fruitful enough rhetorical analysis to discuss the Alteration Techniques detectable on an excerpt from a single page of Obama’s texts (the aforementioned passage from *Dreams from My Father*, for instance, would work nicely). For an analysis which offers a description of method, however, it will be beneficial to first articulate how Obama’s dualism transformatives “work,” particularly in regard to how they enable the author to arrive upon a particular position and, at the same time, encourage future dialogues on the-previously oversimplified-binary.

Obama manages this feat through the discursive arrival at (what I have called) “The Fourth Locale,” a rhetorical result seldom achieved in contemporary politics. To explain, consider that within any typical, narrow dichotomy one might choose to employ, such as Black/White, there is always, implicitly at least, a median, central point between

the two polar extremes (colloquially labeled, appropriately enough, as “Grey Area”). Accordingly, one of several perspectives prevalent in current political discourse is the notion that this exact middle, 50-50 locality is the most desirable point for a politician to arrive upon (this is, arguably, a consequence both of George W. Bush’s “Manichean” rhetoric and Obama’s calls for Post-Partisanship during his presidential campaign; the erasure of Red State/Blue State has become quite trendy).

Barack Obama, meanwhile, has never been a fan of “triangulation politics,” whether media-imagined or in the application of actual political theory.¹⁴ He prefers, instead, to arrive upon a nuanced, precise position elsewhere in the applicable spectrum. His rhetoric reflects such an inclination, as its endpoint always arrives at a place discernibly closer to one pole of a traditional dichotomy than the other, while overtly referencing the original binary in the allowance of future discourse. This arrival, which I argue is more productive than the mere “blending” of an existent dichotomy, can be referred to, again, as “The Fourth Locale” (in this definitional framework, the dualisms represent the First and Second Locales, while the 50-50 nullification is the Third).

The Alteration Technique takes different paths to arrive upon this rhetorical destination, and this chapter will discuss several, variant instances of this process (without getting bogged down in labeling). An excellent example of an Alteration situation in which Obama demonstrates the nearsightedness of a binary’s existent understanding is found in Obama’s 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote address, “Out of Many, One,” in which the author probes Red State/Blue State divisionary language:¹⁵

We worship an awesome God in the Blue States, and we don't like federal agents poking around in our libraries in the Red States. We coach Little League in the Blue States and yes, we've got some gay friends in the Red States. There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq and there are patriots who supported the war in Iraq.

Within the more easily observable challenging of assumptions about both "colors" ("Blue-Staters" are Anti-Religion and Anti-Jock; "Red-Staters" are Pro-Patriot Act homophobes) we notice a *slight* trending toward one end, not surprisingly, the Democratic one. We can state definitively that Obama is "a part" of the action-performing "we" in the Blue State examples, while relegating himself to, at least potentially, an observatory outsider role in the Red State cases (one need not be *in* a Red State to have gay friends *in* a Red State, for instance). The distinction is slight, but observing it enables me to point out Obama's avoidance of a precise 50-50 endpoint. Meanwhile, by removing state colors entirely, the subsequent line regarding patriotism is geared, clearly, toward expanding the signifier of "patriotism" (a term appropriated by the Bush Administration in the buildup to Iraq) to include those opposed to the war (another Pro-Blue gesture, though completely bound by implication). Speaking generally, the speech's *leaning* is Blue, albeit narrowly so. Notice, in addition, that the framing of the above excerpt in no way *removes* either polarity; the terms are as understood and rhetorically available as they were prior to Obama's remarks; the difference is simply that the terms have now passed through Obama's filter, one which has been broadly influential and, thus, has reconfigured the dichotomy's core understanding.¹⁶

This complication-through-filtering process, while it achieves the same end, unfolds slightly differently in Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech, with which he challenges the typical understanding of Perfect/Imperfect. Here, the Alteration is one of form: "This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected." By shifting the adjective "perfect" (used in clear reference to the unattainable, Platonic ideal) to the verb "perfected" (here used as if synonymous with "improved"), the speaker moves in an optimistic direction, considering America's frequent preoccupation with self-improvement. The end result can be described, albeit inelegantly, as "favoring perfection." Elsewhere in this speech, we see further wordplay surrounding this dichotomy; Obama repeatedly employs the adverb-adjective compound of "more perfect" (as an additional synonym for "improved"), and, in a deliberately self-humbling strategy, reserves the explicit use of the other side of the dichotomy, "imperfect," for his own campaign. By reserving one extreme for self-deprecation, the term becomes less powerful in the overall discussion; thus the speaker's message, holistically, arrives closer to the "perfect" end of the spectrum, rather than a 50-50 split, indeed a possible option for a rhetor addressing this polarity (particularly if the rhetor opted to focus on the problematic aspects of the philosophical notion of perfectibility). The overall rhetorical message, therefore, is geared toward the desirability of a "more perfect/improved" America which, the speaker states explicitly, requires a movement away from preoccupation with the inflammatory comments of his reverend. Again, a specific position is gradually arrived upon.

Another, slightly different route through which Obama's rhetorical strategies find this Fourth Locale is exemplified shortly before the conclusion of the "Out of Many,

One” speech; Obama also often uses qualifiers to establish precise cut-off points when employing a “half-dichotomy” (that is to say the explicit statement of one side of a polarity). It is worthwhile to note that the following employment of multiple dichotomies occurs at the brief end of an enormous sentence, one which offers the audience a detailed articulation of the circumstances surrounding a Democratic presidential victory, then abbreviated into a tiny catchphrase (precisely the sort that Obama has been assailed for using in the past). He ends this extremely lengthy sentence with the following: “Out of this long political darkness a brighter day will come.” Brief as it may be, this sentence-within-a-sentence contains two overtly-stated dichotomy halves, with the other pole implied (“Long/Short” and “Darkness/Light”). It is, here, qualifiers that enable us to determine the specific end-point of Obama’s intent and to understand precisely where this discussion arrives.

Of course, this oratory is intended to imbue the audience with optimism regarding Democratic political success, but note the manner in which Obama, very subtly, encourages *tempered* expectations: A Democratic presidential victory will result in “a brighter *day*” after “a long political darkness.” There seems to be an indication toward a shorter time frame, with the choice of “day” rather than a word such as “age,” “dawn,” “era,” or even “time” (all of which would allow for more open interpretation). The “darkness,” meanwhile, will apparently become “brighter”; the now-President avoids the word “light” (possibly partly out of fear of Bush-linkage). We are, of course, encouraged toward viewing a Democratic presidency as a good thing, but the dichotomous discussion, here, makes it clear that this “good” is not “absolute good.” Again, The Fourth Locale, where Obama’s rhetorical strategies end up, leads us to something more

than absolutism or negation; it establishes a clear position and, considering Obama's favored refusal to discard anything completely, leaves the door open for future dialogue. A detailed look at the specific purposes of "Out of Many, One" and its various uses of the Alteration Technique will elucidate this.

The Alteration Technique in "Out of Many, One"

The 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote speech, with which now-President Obama became a nationally-known figure, opens with an interesting rhetorical choice: "On behalf of the great state of Illinois, crossroads of a nation, Land of Lincoln, let me express my deepest gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention." Abraham Lincoln, of course, exists within a place in American mythology that transcends the 21st century partisanship the mainstream media claims to disdain so completely.¹⁷ Lincoln's inclusion certainly appears a sensible "warming up" for the Red State/Blue State interrogation to follow. It is, however, the "crossroads" metaphor for the state of Illinois (which Obama speaks "on behalf of" and thus self-identifies with) that makes the introduction a curiosity, hinting toward a dialogue-encouraging Fourth Locale. To explain, the term "crossroads" indicates both a critical connection point between two disparate paths and, alternately, a place at which a critical decision must be reached. We may link this, therefore, to Obama's upcoming attempts to draw a distinction between President Bush, who frequently referenced himself as *both* a "Uniter" and a "War President" and a president such as *Lincoln* whose most-famous political position strove for unification (though, obviously and ironically, it did not work out that way at first); the Obama-Connected term "crossroads" draws a complex, implied division between "Unifying Decision-Maker" and "Divisive Decision-Maker."

In this difficult-to-detect binary, a pattern is established: Obama wishes to draw distinctions, not absolute separations (Bush is not implicitly contrasted, even, to a Democrat, but rather to a glorified member of his own party whose decision-making is more respected by historians). The audience finds itself at an understanding neither polar, nor banally centrist, and is primed for similar rhetorical nuance. Most frequently, the dichotomy in question within this speech is the individual/collective opposition challenged in numerous Obama texts.¹⁸

Collectivism vs. Individualism

The philosophical matter of individualism vs. collectivism is central to “Out of Many, One”; the rousing conclusion that “there is a *United States* of America,” certainly, relies upon the notion of a collective as embraceable, while the speech begins, as do virtually all¹⁹ of Obama’s oratories, with his unique personal narrative (in the realm of national politics, the term “unique” is undeniably applicable to this speaker). The orator begins with vivid detail from his own past, concluding with the pointed remark that “my story is part of the larger American story.” This specific Obama/collective dichotomy, which will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter, is here quickly altered to suit the specific audience in question, as Obama attributes the following knowledge to *John Kerry* and not himself: “He knows that it’s not enough for just some of us to prosper. For alongside our famous individualism, there’s another ingredient in the American saga. A belief that we’re all connected as one people.” With respect to “which Locale” on the individual/collective spectrum this rhetorical strategy brings us to, it must be considered that here, as in all places with which Obama speaks of “the collective individual,” the concept of an individual entity is never completely negated (it is, in fact, simply

expanded to include all Americans). Thus, as unification-oriented as the speech may be, the “rugged individual” never vanishes; the rhetoric arrives at a place neither polar nor “dead-center.”

In some instances, in fact, we see rhetoric moving surprisingly closer to “Bootstraps Mentality,” though it is limited with qualifiers designed to prevent absorption into Ronald Reagan-style rhetoric. Obama offers, for instance, that “people don’t expect government to solve *all* their problems” (italics mine) an explicit part-acceptance, part-reversal of Reagan’s famous (and notably dualistic) “government is not the solution to the problem, government *is* the problem.” It is notable, here, that the influence of Reagan’s success upon the political landscape has been broad enough that, 24 years later, Obama must pay attention to it; this nod from the speaker reminds us of Kenneth Burke’s discussion of discourse’s role in the subsequent development of future rhetoric and reality. Obama continues, however, to exclaim: “But they (people) sense, deep in their bones, that with just a slight change in priorities, we can make sure that every child in America has a decent shot in life.” The “we” employed here is critical (such Bahktin-affirming, repeated shifts from I-to-We experience throughout the speech will be returned to); by indicating that all Americans can take part in “making sure,” Obama removes the boundary between government/people and arrives upon a limited, yet collective space for governance and problem-solving. One is reminded of Freire’s approach to the classroom, one in which the collective participates fully and equally, while a leader is, at least nominally, retained. In Obama’s speech, government is still a group of select individuals (John Kerry and others are singled out as worthy leaders), but politicians are here charged

with embracing a fully-participatory “we” in order to connect the “micro-collective” of government to the “macro-collective” of “one America.”

Mini-Case Study #1: Misattribution in Barack Obama’s Discourse with Joe the Plumber

While I am on the subject of shifting pronouns and their usage in Barack Obama’s rhetoric, I am inclined to mention one situation in which the public was greatly misled with regard to such use. In the six years since “Out of Many, One” was delivered, Obama has received numerous reasoned critiques from noted economic theorists. One less-than-credible dissenter, Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher (AKA: Joe the Plumber), sparked a criticism of Obama for his “redistributionist” economic agenda in 2008, causing otherwise intelligent people to continuously beg a question: Where, precisely, did Obama’s loyalties lie, with respect to economic theory? The discursive instance Obama’s critics seized upon during his documented conversation with Wurzelbacher, in which he patiently (“patiently” is not a sufficient word, actually²⁰) explained his economic plan²¹ (with respect to high-income small businesses), was the moment with which he concluded “I think when you spread the wealth around, it’s good for everybody.” Even in a deeply non-public rhetorical moment, we see a continued concern with the collective/individual dichotomy treatments discussed above; the collective here trumps the individual, but the implied argument is that Obama’s plan is also the best for individual entities.

The shift of voice from first, to second, to third-person (collective concerns) in Obama’s three clauses here, comparable to the constant shifts in “Out of Many, One,” however, is critical in itself. Obama’s critics opted to focus on the statement as proof that he intended to wage “class warfare” (code for socialism, which is not class warfare, per

se, but I digress). In order for this to be true, the “you” in “when you spread the wealth around” would have to have been a reference to either now-President Obama or government as a holistic concept. A look at the broader quote, however, reveals that the “you” in question is actually representative of “The American People,” and that the comment was actually concerning how best to encourage Gross Domestic Product-friendly, capitalistic activity. As we have seen, the final positions of Obama remain complex, inabsolute. By determining the accurate function of a pronoun, we see, even in casual conversation, that the speaker’s Fourth Locale is a carefully carved-out place between Grover Norquist and Bernie Sanders (the only nominal socialist in American national politics). Playing a similar “Pronoun Game”²² can, I believe, reveal much about Obama’s rhetorical strategies in the more formal “Out of Many One,” which I now return to.

In this speech, following the aforementioned personal introduction, Obama shifts, briefly, to some more conventional fare: There is a brief, collective, “Founding Fathers Tribute,” followed by a (rather moving) “Testimonial” from laid-off factory workers; neither are particularly innovative, but both feature the text’s continued shift between first person and collective discussions. Then, abruptly, Obama turns to the second person, an oratorical place from which, as the “Joe the Plumber” mini-case study above demonstrates, confusion can exist with respect to which half of the individual/collective dichotomy this rhetoric is favoring. Here, the speaker tells the audience to: “Go into the collar counties around Chicago. People will tell you they don’t want their tax money wasted, by a welfare agency or by the Pentagon.” Here, it seems, we are shifting, completely, in the direction of the individual, as Obama is (figuratively) encouraging his

audience to take a trip to Chicago's suburbs. This rhetorical shift, as always, remains incomplete, as Obama ascribes a (politically safe and) *collective* opinion to all of those living in the surrounding areas. This section, I would argue, is where Obama's shift toward an eventual Fourth Locale, near but not *upon* the collective polarity, begins.

However, abruptly, discussion then *reshifts* to John Kerry, who, as I indicated above, becomes at once individual subject and intellectual stand-in for Obama. This speech, naturally, lauds Kerry's specific biography (EG: War Hero; Prosecutor; Long-Serving Politician) here, but he also takes the time to attach Kerry to a broader, more generically embraceable, Presidentiality. We note, here, Obama's declaration that "John Kerry understands the *ideals* of community, faith, and service because they've defined his life" (italics mine). I debated putting the italics on the "the" in the preceding quote, because the choice of article reveals much about its implicit message; the premise is that Kerry understands a particular, limited set of ideals which are and are not acceptably *American*, and therefore is a suitable president. Of course, by not narrowing his audience's understanding of what those particular ideals *are*, he again avoids going completely into that totality, maintaining an inabsolute path that appears to belong at once both to him and John Kerry.

The final variation on the Alteration Technique that I have described above, namely the use of descriptive qualifiers to minimize polarity, is also abundant in this speech. Obama tells the audience early on: "Let's face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely." The choice of "pretty" in this sentence, seemingly merely conversational, seems quite deliberate considering that Obama's personal detail includes the following: "They (his parents) gave me an African name, Barack or 'blessed,'

believing that in America, your name is no barrier to success.” Therefore, the previous remark that his presence is “pretty” unlikely both reinforces American exceptionalism²³ (a key theme of his rhetoric), and rejects the absolutism of racial/ethnic disadvantage, another important component included within. The term “unlikely” remains useful in this context, Obama leaning toward it in order to emphasize the specialness of the moment, but the word “pretty” modifies its degree.

Later, Obama’s rousing oratory features two similarly-adjusting descriptive qualifiers in one sentence, which, when considered together, suggest that Obama’s critics have underestimated the speech’s sophistication: “I’m not talking about *blind* optimism here—the *almost* willful ignorance that thinks unemployment will go away if we just don’t talk about it, or the health care crisis will solve itself if we just ignore it” (italics mine). The term “blind optimism” insulates the speaker from criticism such as Liam Julian’s aforementioned “empty words” charge (though, obviously, such criticisms came anyway) by stressing that this oratory is not purely decorative. By indicating “optimism” as superior to its binary opposite, however, the rhetor is able to land at a particular endpoint (albeit an unsurprising choice in this case). This specific choice, fittingly, meets Wayne Booth’s call for “the action and natural command to ‘assent pending disproof’” (101). Booth’s conception of a “yes”-oriented intellectual understanding is, like Obama’s advocacy of optimism, not “blind optimism”; this is positivity instead endowed with some cynicism. Booth, like Obama, here arrives at a specific point on a spectrum of understanding, a Fourth Locale.

“Almost willful ignorance,” meanwhile, resonates as a particularly advanced implicit critique of the incumbent Administration, one which rejects complete

condemnation. The second President Bush's self-cultivated anti-intellectual image had inspired speculation on whether his subsequent job performance was the consequence of deliberate choice, or the mere by-product of stupidity.²⁴ Obama's dual qualifiers, "almost" and "willful," enable the rhetor to pull off a complex implication. Not even mentioning Bush by name, the orator both assigns a degree of ignorance to his subject and indicates that such ignorance is not "pure," but rather a consequence of a *partial* determination to reject self-enlightenment. In essence, the comment manages to validate *both* the notion of Bush the idiot and Bush the pigheaded "decider" without a full embrace of either. That the then-President actually goes unmentioned enables the rhetoric to remain affirmative in spite of its potency.

Indeed, even in the discursive moment with which Obama makes his most straightforward critique of Bush and the then GOP-majority congress, his language retains a distance from politics-as-usual. When he offers the aforementioned "out of a long political darkness, a brighter day will come," the audience is both pointed to a definitive understanding of this "darkness" (it is the consequence of Bush and his allies in congress) and addressed in a nonabrasive tone. Moreover, Obama not only avoids naming said darkness, he employs a qualifier that refrains from personal attack (there is no assault upon the sitting President's character). Once again, the arrived-upon Locale is specific, neither banality nor totality. Bush's administration is a part of a *political* darkness; he is not the Prince of Darkness.

Obama's restraint is also seen in his alterative challenging of numerous other terms, often quite loaded with divisive power in contemporary rhetoric. His benign challenges to absolutism are often remarkable, given the ultimate intent (or at least a

primary intent) of his discourses. For example, in all of the rhetoric I am examining in depth, the Black/White binary (obviously a subject to address delicately for a man on his way to becoming the first African-American president) is confronted and interrogated. In *Dreams from My Father*, the author makes the choice not to capitalize the word “Black” unless citing or depicting someone else’s commentary, an indication that the term holds no stable meaning for him. The narrative documents his progression toward a rejection of simple racial definition, as the now-President is confronted in the text by, seemingly, every possible conception of “Blackness” used in modern America, finding them all unsatisfactory. The protagonist, for instance, engages Black Nationalism, embodied in his militant friend Rafiq. We learn of “the truth as Rafiq saw it” (197), a truth that includes a vastly different conception of the African-American experience; the memoir makes this truth-difference clear and neither accepts nor fully denounces it. For instance, Obama opts to capitalize the word “Black” in Rafiq’s dialogue, indicating that Rafiq’s understanding of the term is more absolute than his own. The subsequent commentary makes it clear that though the author is strongly intellectually divorced from Black Nationalism, Rafiq’s is not an evil, undefendable truth. We return, here, to the Fourth Locale concept. Obama moves away, especially intellectually, from Black Nationalism, but not “all the way.” The capitalization of “Black” in Rafiq’s speech grants this character, and his ideology, a degree of validity.

“Out of Many, One,” meanwhile, addresses someone *else’s* understanding of the term “Black” when he speaks of “eradicating the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white.” Here, Obama refuses to embrace the White Intellectual/Black Anti-Intellectual dichotomous conception embraced by, if John McWhorter’s *Losing the Race*

is to be believed, a large portion of Black America. Again, however, the rejection is not absolute; the implication is that one can still, potentially, “be authentically Black” and crack the books. Embracing intellectualism does *not* mean subscribing to a utopian notion of “colorblindness.” The end result, therefore, is another near-absolute, but incomplete, movement toward assimilation. In “A More Perfect Union,” Black/White is further complicated, when Obama heavily implies a quibble with a variety of racial conceptions. The text indicates that such diverse labels as “too black,” “not black enough,” and “an exercise in affirmative action” all fall short in an effort to understand “the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas.” Notably, the rhetor *chooses* the notion of himself as a part of the “black community” (rather than mulatto, an available precise rhetorical 50-50), while also articulating that his white ancestors are “a part of me.” The author “chooses black” (via the continued embrace of the now-controversial church) without abandoning white, again arriving upon a specific position that embraces the text’s broader message of open dialoguing on the subject of race.

Meanwhile, as Obama emerges as a candidate for national office, “truth” and “history” fluctuate more in his rhetoric than one might consider possible, given the Post-Nixonian emphasis placed upon a President’s trustworthiness and America’s ongoing love affair with its own historical narrative. David Plouffe, Obama’s campaign manager, quotes then-candidate Obama, in casual conversation, as promising “to speak the truth as best I understand it” (59). Context is worthy of mention here. If anyone would be determined to present Barack Obama as a man of unwavering conviction, it would be the person who ran his campaign. Instead, truth remains open to variance; the quoted candidate has clear convictions, but implicitly indicates that arriving upon a “pure” truth

is beyond his capabilities. A stable conception of history, also, is challenged as the rhetor nears the presidency. In “A More Perfect Union,” a speech largely geared toward the quelling of a controversy that threatened to derail his rise to power, the author chooses to admonish both “White” and “Black” Americans to reconsider their current attitudes with respect to the country’s racial history, as a means of achieving progress. Meanwhile, he cites William Faulkner’s remark that “the past isn’t dead and buried, in fact it isn’t even past,” thus allowing for history’s inherent impact upon modern race relations. Moving in both directions within the same speech, by owning up to the inevitability of history’s impact on the present while simultaneously stressing that its power can be mitigated indicates what Obama is referring to when he speaks of “choosing a better history” (439) in the epilogue of his seminal *Dreams from My Father*.

This memoir’s role in the formation of Obama’s rhetoric cannot be overstated. Even though “Out of Many, One” reflects a vision that is in accordance with the political positions of John Kerry’s 2004 Presidential campaign, it is notable that the orator places himself “inside the head” of his party’s nominee: “John Kerry believes in an America where all Americans can afford the same health coverage our politicians in Washington have for themselves...John Kerry believes in energy independence.” While here the assignment of “belief” could easily be replaced with *John Kerry’s position on the issue of health care reform is...* the rhetoric is reminiscent of The Vision Technique, much more advanced in the pages of *Dreams from My Father*, the focus of the next chapter; I will show how Barack Obama challenges existent simplicities, arriving upon a very specific Fourth Locale via the communication of his own visions, unaltered by what has previously been established (as in the case of “America According to John Kerry”).

CHAPTER TWO: OBAMA'S MOVEMENTS FROM WITHIN TO A FOURTH LOCALE VIA THE VISION TECHNIQUE

The small visionary portion of “Out of Many, One” which, while inventively crafted, likely reflects the wishes of then-Presidential nominee John Kerry, certainly differs from Obama’s unfiltered Visionary Rhetoric. This discourse springs, interestingly enough, from a place of personal identity crisis. This is demonstrated in the pages of his memoir *Dreams from My Father*. Semi-humorously, the author conveys one of his key thematic messages, when he likens his search for a cultural/ethnic identity to “calling directory assistance” (114) and attempting to “find himself.” Obama plays out both sides of the imaginary phone call: “Information-what city please?” “Uh...I’m not sure. I was hoping you could tell me. The name’s Obama. Where do I belong” (115)? Aside from the manner with which the writer here addresses the basic Western conception of “belonging,” what is most compelling about this conceit, and others like it in the text, is that we can trace the author’s eventual macro-vision to personal matter, expressed through the filter of his imagination. The most frequently-used strategy toward that end, as it unfolds on the pages of the autobiography, will here be referred to as The Vision Technique. This chapter will explain and repeatedly demonstrate this literary path to dichotomy-challenging, in which the author depicts his evolving self trying to understand the others characters’ experiences and emotions, attaching them to collectives. By exploring these characters’ relationships to societal collectives, and his relationship to *them*, the author is able to construct a very specific position, one which resists simplistic attitudes toward various collectives and their relationships with one another. This is, in short, another route to “The Fourth Locale.” I will provide illustrations of how this

approach has impacted his ensuing rhetoric and some remarks upon its relevance to various theoretical commentaries.

The narrative preceding the aforementioned situation points to the foundation of this strategy. A letter from the author's father (whose presence looms heavily in the book and is significant to this chapter, as will be discussed) urges a visit to Kenya, stressing that "the important thing is that you know your people" (114). Coming to an understanding of "his people," and figuring out where he belongs in relation to them, becomes the central challenge of the memoir, through which the story's protagonist develops an elaborate worldview, one which rejects polarities and nurtures nuance, in accordance with the holistic understanding of the Obama binary-problematizing detailed in this thesis.

Explaining the process more specifically, the letter from Obama's father is a trigger to numerous feelings with respect to the author's identity and the nature of his basic relationships. He depicts himself struggling through the composition of a letter in response, adjusting the salutation several times, from "Dear Dad" to "Dear Father" to "Dear Dr. Obama," a deliberate literary device establishing his growing emotional distance from the story's basic identification model (his strained relationship with his father). Around this sense of incompleteness, the author crafts a resultant, accumulating misunderstanding of the world as a whole, represented by problematic encounters with various individuals and collectives, with the individuals generally serving as *representatives of* collectives. Through vivid storytelling, Obama offers the reader grand complexity in a story via the shedding of oversimplification-based misunderstanding.

Initially, the collective-representative individuals that become the subject of Obama's ruminations (ranging from, among others, African-Americans more comfortable with their skin color {whom he envies} to strangers in Kenya who become symbols of the shakiness of particular intellectual concepts) endure his generalizations, until he eventually recognizes the broader nature of both his story and the surrounding, bigger picture. In short, the writer uses each collective-representing individual as a building block en route to a macro-understanding of the world's enduring complexity. The text, therefore, can be described as one that recognizes the "interdependence between the individual and collective aspects of the reconciliation process" (215), constructing a "critical narrative that emphasizes how learners learn to trace their subjectivities as constantly shifting" (219), to doubly quote Michalinos Zembylas. While Ronald Reagan, as William Lewis points out, was also given to visionary rhetoric, his techniques, unlike Obama's, focused on an "assertion of permanence" (276). Obama's Technique, instead, represents an intellectual struggle with instability, represented both in individuals and the collective experiences they reflect.

Firstly, and primarily, Obama's father, referred to throughout the story as "the Old Man" (other fatherly characters do not receive capitalization; the caps reflect the father's "God-like" influence over his son), remains a challenging puzzle for the protagonist. He is, consistently, "both more and less than a man" (5) to his son, who gathers information about his father's life (and, by extension, his own) as his world unfolds and becomes increasingly complicated. This father-character is progressively revealed to be, in Obama's ever-shifting mind: Brilliant, but a professional "failure," family-loving yet family-deserting, a rebellious spirit yet a rigid disciplinarian to his son

(on the one occasion they interact in person). The above example, concerning the letter he receives from his father and the concept of “belonging,” comes shortly before the Old Man’s death, an event that compounds Obama’s mental strife. As the narrative moves ahead several years, the text reflects continued internal conflicts, as well as the style through which The Vision Technique is most frequently carried out in the memoir.

At this stage, the writer, about to depart from Chicago and his position as a community organizer for Harvard Law School and concerned that he is deserting “his people,” transfers this anxiety to (his then understanding of) his father’s personal narrative:

The same story I imagined my father telling himself 28 years before, as he boarded the plane to America, the land of dreams. He, too, had probably believed he was acting out some grand design, that he wasn’t simply fleeing from possible inconsequence” (276-77).

Here, Obama struggles both with his own scruples regarding ethnic and cultural assimilation and the challenge of coming to an understanding of his absent father’s life. The in-depth combination enables the author to communicate a deeply personal and much broader point, simultaneously. While many of Obama’s readers cannot relate to the tale’s particulars, most can arrive upon an understanding of both the “micro” and “macro” points *when the two are combined*. We see this throughout the memoir, which serves as the blueprint for all of his subsequent rhetorical strategies. To wit, now-President Obama has spent 13 years addressing, then blurring dichotomies; beginning with *Dreams from My Father*, we see how his own, unique biography, with which the majority of his audience could *not* easily relate, is linked to a steady progression of collective-

representing individuals, and throughout his documented attempts at shared experience, a broad connection is made with the audience, even if that audience cannot relate to the specific, Fourth-Localed end result of each narrative outcome.

Fittingly, the memoirist concludes his main plotline by communicating an understanding he arrives upon while seated between his father and grandfather's graves in Kenya:

I realized that who I was, what I cared about, was no longer just a matter of intellect or obligation, a construct of words. I saw that my life in America—all of it²⁵—was connected with this small plot of earth an ocean away, connected by more than just the accident of a name or the color of my skin (430).

This particular brand of interconnectedness, achieved through the merger of Obama not only with one collective, but with a *second*, enables Obama to both maintain his specific identity and link the collectives (here, it is America and the international “Black” experience). This, too, is a constant element of his oratory. Again, this arrival would not be possible without the various creative visualizations offered in *Dreams from My Father's* pages, which make the connections clear. In effect, this elaborate linking prevents polarization, as the author eventually denies the simplistic options of self-isolation or the exclusive connection to one collective or the other. This results in an intellectually-arrived upon Fourth Locale, binding (I must here illuminate semi-symbolically): Obama/Micro-Collective/Macro-Collective. This choice is deliberate and consistent in his texts; a more isolationist understanding is rarely the consequence of The Vision Technique. Consider, for instance, that *Dreams from My Father* features, near its

conclusion, an elaborate section of prose that shares numerous features with the Book of Genesis, a text that, as generally read, tends toward simplified understandings of ethnic identity. However, through its specific content, Obama's memoir moves instead away from such stable understandings, in both the case of his individual circumstances and a safe notion of collective ethnicity.

This creation myth, presented by the author as a dreamlike response to the oral storytelling of his Grandmother, focuses on the story of his grandfather's life, from the smaller story of his emotional hardness to the broader matter of Black Kenya's acquiescence to white colonialism.²⁶ This thematically ties with the "micro" and "macro" anxieties I have attributed to Obama's character above. Meanwhile, rejecting both the idealization of his relatives and pure demonization of their white "oppressors," the text instead pushes toward a surprising location; the tale ends with Obama's father "weeping" (424) over the death of his father, just as the author will soon do for *him* at the text's conclusion. The identical verb choice of "weep" at the text's conclusion is not a coincidence. Instead, the Micro-story of the creation myth mirrors the Macro-tale of *Dreams from My Father*, with Barack Sr. transferred from the role of elusive father to that of confused son. The story in question, the rhetor muses, is "a single story" (394), but it is not by chance that, at the end of the memoir, the protagonist departs down a "widening dirt road" (430). The metaphor is obvious; the author sees the complexity of his past and future, as well as the "widening" world in which they will play out as he proceeds through life.

Barack Obama's story, therefore, becomes a part of a much broader narrative, one that arrives upon a particular ending, but is accessible to any audience member. In

completing his memoir by linking his own family's mythology to America's (see the large quote excerpted on the preceding page), the author has arrived upon an answer to the "directory assistance" question of "who Barack Obama is" and "where he belongs." The answer is not simplistic (in fact, Obama's conception of his own specific identity would be difficult to define without making it the focus of this entire thesis²⁷), but the *result* is satisfactory; the writer arrives upon an intellectual determination which allows him to be both comfortable in his, very specific, identity and capable of a complex worldview that stresses both difference and commonality, the latter favored. Obama's key phrase for all of this, essentially repeated in both his memoir and subsequent speeches is "we share more than divides us" (382). Note, as always, that unity, in Obama's rhetoric, is not *absolute*, the implied dichotomy of together/separate is neither accepted nor nullified, it rather arrives upon a location close to "together" but acknowledging "some separate."

It is, fittingly, at the end of this memoir's discursive journey that the audience obtains a full sense of who "Barack Obama" is, in the post-graveyard scene. Firstly, we have the epilogue, in which Obama stresses the "messiness of history" (433) and the law as, partially, "memory, a long-running conversation, a nation arguing with its conscience" (437). Returning to the *New York Times* article I mentioned in my introduction, "The Muddled Selling of the President," it is here that I base my quibble with Richard Stevenson's notion that (paraphrasing) "Obama has lost control of his narrative." The text of *Dreams from My Father* points toward a destination, to be sure, but the story within makes it clear that the rhetor does not regard himself to be consistently, or even frequently, in control of the story. Notably, in my edition of the

memoir, an excerpt from *The Audacity of Hope* is included. Lest the reader assume that this is a purely calculated move on the part of the writer and his supporters to create Obama's "single story," (not too far-fetched an idea, given that Obama's aforementioned campaign manager calls the latter book "a dry run for the presidency" {Plouffe 5}), I point out the portions of *Dreams from My Father* that make it simply incompatible with any feasible, singular "Obama narrative." The author, for instance, is casual in his mention of using "a little blow" (93); either painstakingly-arrived upon repentance or complete non-mention of cocaine use would clearly be more beneficial to a constant, politically-ambitious "narrative." Instead of this misperception of the now-President's memoir, I favor its understanding as Obama's "Proto-Text," the tale of an often confused young man making peace with his personal and intellectual demons through the expansion of his imagination and perspectives, a peace that must be made before any stabs can be made at policymaking. In short, it is here that the Fourth Locales of Obama's rhetoric begin to emerge, as he depicts the formative experiences that enabled him to engage polarization, arriving upon a deeper, more complex understanding.

Often, the writer uses generic backdrops to frame his Vision exercises in such a manner that they remain true to his individual-yet-collective approach. Consider, for instance, his narrative's commentary on his grandparents' past, that begins, fittingly enough, with an acknowledgement that it is his own "take" on their history, rather than an attempt at pure biography (15). The author pictures them "in every American town in those years before the war, him in baggy pants and a starched undershirt...offering a cigarette to this smart-talking girl with legs nice enough to model hosiery for the local department store" (15). Analyzed carefully for its "big-picture" implications, this passage

is telling; Obama is connecting this portion of his own, specific and complex background to the composite American experience. Elaborating, his grandparents represent, *partly*, the “White” aspect of his, and America’s experience; Obama touches upon his discomfort with his grandmother’s racial attitudes in depth in the “A More Perfect Union” speech and explicitly asserts that her attitudes represent “a part of the country he loves.” To a *very* limited degree, this is his grandparents’ role in his assorted narratives. As individuated as they become, the author also envisions them (in his memoir) as “vaguely liberal, although their ideas would never congeal into anything like a firm ideology; in this, too, they were American” (17). The “gelatin-like” ideological flexibility Obama’s musings assign, here, is twofold; the author views both his grandparents and America in an often-transforming light, and he transmits a “terministic screen” to his audience in which they are encouraged to accept both his “micro” and “macro” Visions as valid. Two collectives are, here, addressed through the representative figures of the grandparents: White America and America. The writing invites the reader to accept both collective understandings as valid and, just as significantly, connected to the more limited subject of Barack Obama. That he does so using his grandparents, who emerge as flawed, yet incredibly sympathetic characters, ensures otherwise skeptical readers of his genuine intent. This leads me to another connection to the work of Wayne Booth.

In *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, Booth confides that much of the key to convincing protesting, skeptical students that he, as part of the University of Chicago’s authoritative apparatus, was capable of entering into meaningful dialogue with them, was through the expression of deep feeling on his own part (156); this dictum (labeled in the text as “Example: Sincerity”) clearly ties in with the strategy behind The

Vision Technique, which forges a connection between the singular rhetor, an individual or small group, and a pair of collectives (one a subsection of the other). In Booth's anecdotal case, it is the goal of his dialogue to bring disenchanted individual students to an understanding of the University's collective populace, thus fulfilling the broader collective/societal expectations for educators without neglecting the importance of teacher/student interaction.²⁸ Obama, meanwhile, consistently employs rhetoric that moves outward from his own story, to a micro-community, ending at a much broader universal; this trait is a commonality in all of the texts I have examined. In the cases of Booth and Obama, the simplicities of the separation are broken down, enabling the rhetoric to lead to a more open, though quite definitive, discursive destination. A mini-case study demonstrating the still-evolving nature of Obama's rhetorical Vision Technique will show how this complex, collective-unifying process has affected American political discourse.

Mini Case-Study #2: "Organizing for America," but Certainly Also for Obama

The esteemed Plouffe, whose campaign strategy is lauded as "perfect" and as having made "electing the first Black president look easy" in Lisa Taddeo's article "The Man Who Made Obama" (a title I obviously object to as downplaying the foundational importance of Obama's rhetoric), has a new mission, as detailed in Taddeo's article; he is currently overseeing the transfer of Barack Obama's 13 million name contact list into, ostensibly, a less-Obama specific site, called *Organizing for America*. The site's ongoing tie to the President's brand is obvious upon perusal, but also clear is the impact of this brand's rhetoric upon mainstream politics. After all, the concept of being a community organizer, as Obama had been in Chicago, was actively mocked during the 2008

Republican National Convention²⁹ as code for ultraliberal (and, perhaps on occasion, for “Black”). Times change. “Community Organizer” has now become a nationwide, mass-marketed phenomena. Obama supporters are encouraged to buy \$25 t-shirts, loudly proclaiming themselves “Community Organizers,” with Obama’s trademark logo and website in much smaller lettering. The product’s description mentions the President, but not the obvious connection to Obama’s own biography. Such a rhetorical situation, in which the original, famous community organizer becomes the political leader generating brand-new organization on his own “community’s” behalf, reminds of the moment in *Dreams from My Father* in which the author references “times when familiarity or weariness dissolved the lines between organizer and leader” (188). Again, a dichotomy is repeatedly broken down in the evolving rhetoric of Obama’s texts.

Specifically, in this mini-case study, we witness the manner through which Obama’s rhetoric (and its influence upon the work of Plouffe and site organizer Mitch Stewart) has inspired a blurring of the distinction between volunteer and authoritative figure volunteered for. Moreover, Obama’s previous standing as something of a “middle man,” or “supervolunteer” (to use Plouffe’s term, referenced in the *Esquire* article), adds increased significance to the weight of this role’s sudden availability to anyone who chooses it. The implicit message, here, is: *You can have the job that the Leader of the Free World used to have, and do it on his behalf.* Of course, the term “community organizer” has been forever altered by Obama’s biographical tale and by those working for him. It is, however, critical to consider the role of The Vision Technique in the formulation of this paradigm shift, which begins in the pages of *Dreams from My Father*.

The moment in this text that exemplifies Obama's rhetorical movement from "struggling organizer" to "leader" is, not surprisingly, one in which Obama observes an individual (actually, in this case a small group), assigns that individual to a collective, and proceeds to connect that smaller collective to a larger one. The difference, however, is that here the protagonist begins to develop his oratorical voice. Specifically, the author describes himself giving an impromptu speech in which he motivates his assigned volunteers by pointing at aimless, troubled inner-city kids outside his window and encouraging them to ponder "who's going to make sure they get a fair shot? The social workers? The gangs?" (171-72). Notably, immediately prior to his nervous, yet impassioned speech, the narrator tells us that he strongly identified, for a moment, with the downtrodden children: "A part of me suddenly felt like joining them, tearing apart the whole dying landscape, piece by piece" (171). This partial, incomplete empathy will be discussed later, but what I stress here is the manner through which Obama uses his Vision Technique in order to convince his weary volunteers to continue working, particularly in a situation with a limited separation of authority.

If we then flash-forward to the development of the "Community Organizer" t-shirts and the section of the product description that advocates "pounding the pavement and making calls," we can see that, regardless of the authoritative distance now-President Obama has obtained, the rhetorical action of using The Vision Technique to "dissolve the line" has not ceased; Obama's "message people" are still stressing "pounding the pavement" to "make sure everyone gets a fair shot" (the language of that last quote is strikingly similar to the language also contained in "Out of Many, One").

Cynicism, of course, is natural in response to such quasi-idealistic rhetoric. Certainly, it is fair to argue that the Obama team has mass-marketed the term “community organizer,” and Obama’s prior rhetoric surrounding it, transforming it into a corporate entity available for the low-low price of \$25 a shirt. One can even go so far as to recall Michel Foucault’s comments with respect to power and authority in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault writes: “It does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine” (202). Considered in the context of the Obama administration’s gradual crumbling of the difference between volunteer/organizer/leader, a complaint can be leveled that such a shift of power merely alters the “mechanical operations” of politics-as-usual in America (precisely the form of political practice Obama’s campaign was framed as opposing). This argument, that Obama’s presidency and its consequent shifting of political influence represents merely a “Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss” scenario, is, in fact, one of the primary criticisms I observe with respect to Obama’s success. There are some mitigations that should be offered in response to this complaint, however. Firstly, there is the matter of Obama’s insistence that no third-party, corporate influences be allowed to contribute to the *Organizing for America* site, thus, at least limiting the “branding” of “community organization.” Moreover, Plouffe’s memoir stresses the numerous occasions during the campaign in which the “supervolunteers” were in place prior to paid staff (167); it seems that Obama’s rhetoric ultimately resulted in “machines” that actually became organic, truly detached from the original. Plouffe, in fact, insists that Obama’s volunteer collective was more irreplaceable than his staff (238). Finally, most relevant to this chapter’s commentary on The Vision Technique, the campaign’s rhetoric, tying Obama directly to

his supervolunteers and, by extension, America as a whole, is highly distinguishable from the rhetoric of Obama's rivals.

These messages, often advertisements such as Hillary Clinton's³⁰ "3 AM" and John McCain's "I Am Joe," depend upon a much more absolute separation between the American public and the authoritative voice of the trustworthy candidate. We may agree with a skeptical read of the seeming attempt to pretend, through rhetoric, that the "we" in the "Yes We Can" Obama slogan has become an "Absolute We," but even the *appearance* of a shared discourse represents a "narrowing of the gap," a different communicative strategy in the rhetoric of political advertisement. Here we can note a tie between the consequences of The Vision Technique on Barack Obama's ethos and my previous discussion of Wayne Booth's comments on the benefits of establishing a shared experience in order to narrow the distance between authority and oppressed. I will now detail the Technique's micro-evolution in this memoir.

Barack Obama sees himself, during the "Origins" portion of his memoir, as "living out a caricature of black male adolescence, itself a caricature of swaggering American manhood" (79). This anxiety, of being connected to numerous subcategories of human existence, reminds of Frank Smith's aforementioned explanation of the human mind's need to both separate and combine (here, the protagonist segregates himself into numerous collectives, themselves subcategories: Black; Male; Adolescent-Swaggerer; American). Indeed, in order for The Vision Technique to be executed fully in the text's early going, when the narrator shows himself as understanding very little, a distance must be maintained in order for the imaginings to occur. Soon after this, the distance grows. Viewing a heroin-addicted acquaintance, the author briefly mentally connects, seeing

himself as similarly on the way to being a “Junkie. Pothead” (93), the two terms reflective of separate categories of, as he calls it “the final, fatal role of the young, would-be black man” (93). The text, then, clarifies that even this disenfranchised collective was not open to him: “I got high for just the opposite effect,” he continues, “something that could push questions of who I was out of my mind” (93). Early in the narrative, therefore, we see a character obsessed with which collective he truly belongs to, to such a point that no collective, regardless of prestige (or lack thereof), can ease his alienation. From the beginning, the musings arrive at unusual places.

Shortly thereafter, the continued self-isolation leads to more elaborate Visions. After speaking to his friend Regina, whose laugh represents, to the young protagonist, “a vision of black life in all its possibility” (104), he imagines the Black, culturally-reflective grandmother she describes in the conversation, eventually replacing *her* in his mind with other grandmothers, representing other collectives. Tellingly, “black life” has a limited range of possibility for the protagonist at this stage; Regina’s grandmother becomes a mere stop on the way to Obama’s mental separation from all the grandmothers of humanity. In these passages, Obama has yet to find his own, nuanced understanding, although the text certainly takes us to curious places in order to convey his ongoing confusion.

The picture brightens somewhat upon Obama’s relocation to Chicago to perform his aforementioned role as community organizer. For instance, during a point of frustration in his work, the narrative depicts him picturing the unfortunate expansion of severe poverty at Chicago’s Atgeld Gardens housing project (where he is employed) onto the marginalized peoples of Indonesia and Palestine, picturing them “settling into their

own Atgeld Gardens, into a deeper despair” (184). The main character still views things through the lens of his own, narrow experience, but now, at least, the collective bodies he pictures are pluralities, rather than plurality-surrogating individuals. Soon thereafter, the author takes a family-seeking trip to Kenya, and furthers his development.

In fact, the function of a bit character at Nairobi Airport proves that this evolving protagonist has learned a lesson. Miss Omoro, a beautiful British Airways employee, tells the young man that she knew his family (the first stranger to know his family’s surname in his entire life). Obama reflects on the experience, imagining the impending joy of acquaintances such as this one:

I felt the comfort, the firmness of identity that a name might provide, how it could carry an entire history in other people’s memory. They might nod and say knowingly, ‘Oh, you are so and so’s son.’ No one here in Kenya would ask how to spell my name, or mangle it with an unfamiliar tongue. My name belonged and so I belonged, drawn into a web of relationships, alliances, and grudges that I did not yet understand (305).

Instantly afterward, however, such imagined mental tidiness quickly fades into a much blurrier reality. As the situations unfold, he learns that his life is “neither tidy nor static, and that even after this hard trip, hard choices would always remain” (377). Most significantly, the author learns the inevitability of complexity through assorted projections of The Vision Technique upon various people, some relatives with whom he shares little concrete experience, some strangers whom he chooses to visualize as potentially members of a constantly changing family. The term “family,” itself, becomes unstable, only reconciled with the Obama-family creation myth and graveyard scene at

the text's conclusion. Fittingly, Miss Omoro's character never returns. Through the loss of this one, final individual who for a moment offered a vanilla conceptualization of a stable identity-based reality, the simplicity of the connection between individuals and collective experiences breaks down for the author, replaced with a Fourth Locale. Fittingly, this happens as he prepares to walk, alongside his distant younger brother Bernard, down the aforementioned "widening dirt road."

Bernard, who appears during the Kenya-situated third act of *Dreams from My Father*, is particularly worth noting at this stage, because his character has a particularly fragile bond with the author (the text reveals, in fact, that the two may not actually be blood relations). Earlier, Obama offers a very brief Vision Technique after unsuccessfully attempting to lecture the unmotivated young man: "He must have been wondering why I was pretending that my rules applied to him" (327), the Vision begins, carrying on to draw assumptions with respect to Bernard's true wishes: "all he wanted was a few tokens of our relationship-Bob Marley cassettes, maybe my basketball shoes" (327). Here, the exchange between the author and Bernard becomes the basis for an intellectual musing on the subject of cultural difference...until Bernard puts his arm around the protagonist and tells him "it's good to have a big brother around" (327). This startling turn prompts a newfound empathy between the characters; the two never become kindred but forge a productive understanding. The final means through which Obama's rhetoric challenges dichotomies, The Empathy Technique, also, aims to accomplish the same, partial and productive (yet incomplete) Fourth Locale reconciliations. The next chapter will explain how this is accomplished.

CHAPTER THREE: THE EMPATHY TECHNIQUE-PARTIAL UNDERSTANDING
AND THE FOURTH LOCALE

I ended my previous chapter with a discussion of Bernard, one of the distant brother-figures in *Dreams from My Father*, and how his character is, potentially, not related to Barack Obama (the term “related” defined here in the narrow, “blood kin” sense). The way this matter is resolved in the text can be connected to the manner through which the next dichotomy-dissolving technique to be discussed (which I have labeled the Empathy Technique) operates in Obama’s rhetoric. Specifically, when the protagonist realizes the likelihood that he and Bernard are not related, he is quickly turned around by his Aunt Zeituni, who tells him that his “Old Man,” now deceased, had said “that they were all his children” (335). Moreover, as Bernard is now connected to the author regardless of genetics (the genetic issue remains unresolved), the situation here enables both attachment and separation, leaning (as usual for Obama) toward the former. A partial, incomplete, intellectual identification is enabled in this elaborate narrative instance, while much of Obama’s rhetoric handles this process more directly. “A More Perfect Union” is a speech rich with this particular approach; this oration will be discussed after an explication of how The Empathy Technique is constructed.

This discursive strategy always involves an admission of some separation, even as its binary-challenging pushes toward common ground between oppositional concepts. Obama’s policy-oriented *The Audacity of Hope* features the core statement behind this communicative philosophy in its early going: “What binds us together is greater than what drives us apart” (2). As I have mentioned with respect to an extremely comparable quote above, the “what drives us apart” portion of the previous sentence cannot be

ignored, as central to Obama's appeals for commonality is the recognition of sustained difference. It is this component of the now-President's rhetoric that enables him to arrive upon a specific, "Fourth Locale," one which results in the author's ability to arrive upon a specific position while opening up the range of possibilities for future dialogue. In the case of polarizing commentaries on the subject of race (such as the comments of Reverend Jeremiah Wright, which necessitated "A More Perfect Union"), a responsive approach which results in a nuanced position while enabling future potentialities is particularly fruitful. Historian Wayne Flynt reinforces the usefulness of such an approach when he remarks that "the more abstract race becomes, the more racist it becomes" (Dawidoff 32). Obama's engagement of racial extremity as expressed by individuals, which neither embraces these individuals' oversimplifications nor flatly denounces the people behind them enables a maximum "concreting" of the subject; both the divisive commentators and the simplicities they espouse are revealed to be isolated parts of a much broader whole, which becomes the most important part of his commentaries.

Such an approach runs contrary to other recent developments in political/rhetorical strategy. Consider Mark Penn's 2007 book *Microtrends*, published shortly before Penn became, in David Plouffe's estimation, "the real culprit behind the underperformance" (179) of Hillary Clinton's unsuccessful presidential campaign. Penn writes that "there is no One America anymore, or Two, or Three, or Eight. In fact, there are hundreds of Americas, hundreds of new niches drawn together by common interests" (xv). This language, obviously opposing (perhaps intentionally) the "Out of Many, One"-rhetoric presented by Barack Obama, is particularly interesting because of the capitalization of "One, Two, Three, and Eight." Broad collectives, to Penn, are fantasy.

Instead, the author of the Bill Clinton “Soccer Moms” strategy of 1996³¹ sees “niche groups,” target audiences for “the current crop of companies, marketers, policymakers, and others who would influence society’s behavior” (xx). It would be a mistake to characterize Barack Obama’s presidential campaign’s rhetoric as diametrically opposed to this outlook (Plouffe was as concerned as any other political operative with his candidate’s appeal to particular voting demographics³²). That said, a sharp contrast can still be drawn; Barack Obama does not speak of “Pro-Semites³³” (Penn 57) and “Moderate Muslims³⁴” (Penn 70). His differing approach is, whenever possible, to speak of broader collectives and to indicate a general unity between them, rejecting extremities expressed by representative members of those collectives, thus moving toward a specific reconciliation. The now-President’s rhetoric does not, in general, introduce new collective labels. It rather embraces and sustains existing categorizations in order to defy conventional conclusions about their divisions through, predominantly in “A More Perfect Union,” The Empathy Technique.

“A More Perfect Union” indeed stands as an excellent example of this process. The oration begins with an introduction that situates the present dramatic scenario (the urgent need for Obama to respond to the inflammatory remarks of Reverend Wright) in the broader context of America’s troubled racial history, citing the country’s “original sin of slavery” and remarking that “the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our constitution,” indicating specifically the text’s “core ideals.” It was necessary for subsequent generations of Americans, Obama continues, to repeatedly “narrow the gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.” Noteworthy here is the unification of past and present America with “our ideals,” combined with the

separation of “their time”; the indication of shared core principles and mitigation of historical context downplays, somewhat, the negative aspects of the country’s narrative. The effect is to acknowledge the great divide between, say, Thomas Jefferson’s writings and his immoral behavior, refusing to invalidate the former due to the latter. Obama’s empathy with the “Founding Fathers” remains incomplete, owing to their “original sin,” but his willingness to stress an ongoing connection between their rhetoric and “his own American story” (the next major focus of the speech) indicates an overall embrace of their contributions to history. Accordingly, Obama’s commentary here must be construed as pointing toward an additional tie between the *country’s* past and present. This tie, too, remains incomplete. Specifically, the above-mentioned “the reality of their time” indicates a shifting conception of reality and explicitly draws a separation between the behaviors of different American generations. Values are shared; actions are disparate.

Afterward, prior to Obama’s customary inclusion of personal detail, the speaker directly ties his presidential candidacy to “the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more caring, and more prosperous America.” Given that he previously mentioned the “civil war and civil disobedience” as an aspect of this “long march,” a fast accusation of self-aggrandizement could be leveled against the speaker here; a critic might oversimplify by complaining that Obama is looking to equate his candidacy with the sacrifices of soldiers and protestors. However, the language chosen (and excluded) in this section is cautious enough to avoid this simplistic assignment of intent. “More just,” “more equal,” etc. keeps the comparison limited; an Obama presidency, the rhetor hopes, would represent improvement, not (as the author puts it later on) “getting (completely) beyond our racial divisions.” In the specific case of

race, the rhetor's ambitions are, only, that "by working together, we can move beyond *some* of our old racial wounds" (italics mine). The author then proceeds to detail precisely how such reconciliations can be achieved, which I will return to, along with the "More Perfect Union" speech as a whole.

Firstly, however, I wish to discuss the specific term "reconciliation," which has taken on a particular significance during the recent health care debate. This rhetorical situation, when considered through the filter of the mainstream media's misunderstanding, seems to contradict Obama's stated desire to subvert "Politics-as-Usual." However, through detailed discussion of Obama's recent rhetoric and its impact, I intend to demonstrate a tie between the congressional understanding of "reconciliation" and the strategy behind Obama's rhetoric. The Empathy Technique is highly applicable to this situation, and will be regularly discussed as I progress.

Mini-Case Study #3: Obama's Empathy Technique, Reconciliation, and the 2009-10 Health Care Debate

Perusing political headlines recently, I stumbled upon one which puzzled me, exclaiming (I am paraphrasing): "Reconciliation is Undemocratic." The headline was particularly stimulating to me while I was in the process of writing this thesis, because I considered "reconciliation" to be a safe term to use for the desired effect of Barack Obama's rhetoric (such as The Empathy Technique). However, here it was used in a diametrically opposite sense, to implicate Obama as guilty of Washingtonian-partisanship. At the time, I had yet to become aware of the Washington-specific context. In the United States Senate, "Reconciliation" is a reference to, as Ezra Klein explains it, an ambiguously-defined process "instituted to ensure that minority obstruction couldn't

block important business like passing a budget or reducing the deficit” (Klein). The understanding of the term, of course, would please Barack Obama and his staunchest legislative allies, as they used Reconciliation to pass legislation overhauling America’s health care system (implementing the process to bypass a Republican filibuster). Klein’s definition is not, however, the way that this procedure has come to be understood by the mainstream media, including sources generally regarded as sympathetic to the Democratic Party. The irony, of course, is that this tactic is being deployed in counter-response to the opposition-only approach of the GOP to Obama’s health care package. The mainstream media appears determined to present the issue-within-the-issue as an Either/Or, rather than recognizing Obama’s desire to arrive upon a Fourth Locale in this situation (I will explain how he has done so in a moment).

Connecting this scenario to Obama’s Empathy Technique, it is noteworthy that, in Klein’s article, the goal of Reconciliation is misstated; the author claims that the purpose is to obtain 50 votes out of 100 in the Senate, a tangible representation of the exact 50-50 ground which the rhetoric of Obama consistently rejects. Instead, Obama aims, as usual, for a specific Fourth Locale elsewhere. The purpose of Reconciliation, here, is actually to obtain a “simple majority.³⁵” Given that even some of those who approve of Obama’s new strategy have slightly misunderstood the situation, it is easy to see that this twist in the saga of Obama’s Health Care Reform has been distorted. Consider, now, the means through which his communicative approaches have aimed away from extremity, as well as 50-50 negotiation, in this debate via The Empathy Technique.

Following a 350-minute, televised “discussion” between the President and various legislators, Obama went on “the offensive” (a term I use in quotes because of his

reluctance to speak in combative terms). He is quoted in the Associated Press as having said, shortly thereafter:

I am eager and willing to move forward with members of both parties on health care if the other side is serious about coming together to resolve our differences and get this done. But I also believe that we cannot lose the opportunity to meet this challenge (Obama).

The tone is, on the surface, “reconciliatory” in the non-Congressional sense of the word. The Republican Party seems to be labeled “The Other Side” (as polarizing as Obama is likely to get), but the “both parties” reference suggests that “the other side” could be, technically, anyone presently opposing “getting this done.” Certainly, individuals such as Joe Lieberman, not a Republican, can be included in this “Other Side” collective. The lengthy Health Care debate has featured, for Obama, active, vigorous confrontations with Democrats as well as Republicans, thus it is just that “opposition” is not oversimplified as “Republican” for purposes of group vilification. “Coming together” becomes the key step to resolution. Consistent with Obama’s strategy of retained partial separation, however, we note his questioning (rather than the pure assault) of “The Other Side’s” motive; the embrace is not, therefore, complete. The end result is a message combining a peace-offering and an implicit awareness of the vaguely-defined opposition’s resistance to *making* peace.

Considering the broader context of the Health Care debate, therefore, we see how the seemingly at-odds definitions of “reconciliation” contained in this debate can be (forgive the language here) reconciled. The compromise-endorsing message cited above includes an obvious indication that “obstruction for obstruction’s sake” is outside of the

acceptable range of actions for The Other Side to take. Accordingly, the debate-concluding strategy of the Congressional Reconciliation process, will (Obama hopes) result in a solution neither obstructed (IE: Absolutist) nor negated (IE: Complete 50-50 stalemate).

The Audacity of Hope spells out the thinking behind carving out such a specific path. Obama comments that “I won’t deny my preference for the story the Democrats tell, nor my belief that the arguments of liberals are more often grounded in reason and fact³⁶” (24). He continues, however, that “the explanations of both the right and the left have become mirror images, stories of conspiracy. Their purpose is not to persuade but to keep their bases agitated and assured of the rightness of their respective causes” (24).

Curiously enough, this mentality is comparable to David Bar-Tal and Nadim Rouhana’s joint explanation of the attitudes and behaviors of both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle: “Each side perceives its own goals as essential for its own survival and, therefore, does not see a place for concessions regarded by *the other side* as essential for conflict resolution” (762; Italics Mine). Obama’s recognition that a similar “survival-based refusal” exists in the narratives behind partisan politics in America leads him to attempt a concrete movement toward a specific, Fourth Locale (a concession-inclusive, successful bill passing), another example of the continued evolution of Obama’s navigation of dichotomies, in this case through The Empathy Technique. This strategy will now be further explicated in the highly-applicable text of “A More Perfect Union.”

Obama’s oration, here, is based upon a bold and elaborate assumption: If you take the time to make a thorough argument, one in which you address the oversimplifications pervading the subject of race relations in America, people will sit still long enough for

you to reach them, and they will, eventually, not only acknowledge your perspective; you will persuade them. Acting on this assumption was certainly risky; as Obama himself says in the speech, “the politically safe thing would be to move on from this episode and just hope that it fades into the woodwork.” Another expedient path for the rhetor to take would be to simply throw Reverend Wright “under the bus” (an action that, in this speech, Obama implicitly charges Hillary Clinton with having done to Geraldine Ferraro after *her* controversial remarks). The appeal of following one of these approaches is obvious, given the undeniable extremity of Wright’s notorious remarks. Again, however, Obama’s goal is a hard-fought approval found through shared understanding. Consider this comment:

I confess that if all I knew of Reverend Wright were the snippets of those sermons that have run in an endless loop on the television and Youtube, or if Trinity United Church conformed to the caricatures being peddled by some commentators, there is no doubt that I would react in much the same way.

The message conveyed here is one of understanding of a collective’s limited knowledge on the subject of Reverend Wright (prior to remarks designed to increase that understanding). However, numerous qualifications are present; Obama implies that much of the current controversy is being stirred by “some” commentators (notably a careful sub-separation which avoids a blanket critique of the mainstream media), essentially charging those concerned with Wright’s remarks with being swayed by irresponsible pundits. Furthermore, Obama makes it clear that the “reaction” he comprehends here would be regrettable for him to have (he “confesses” that he might have the same issues),

and, perhaps most tellingly, that his reaction would be somewhat different (reacting in “*much* the same way” is distinguishable from reacting in “the same way”). Here, the rhetor draws various, extremely subtle distinctions between his hypothetical reaction to Wright’s “snippets” and others’ *actual* reactions. Also, notably, the reactions he addresses here are, only, the responses of “those for whom my statements of condemnation are not enough.” This limits the collective he is addressing; the statements of condemnation he is referring to are “unequivocal,” characterizing Wright’s vantage point as a “profoundly distorted view of this country, a view that sees white racism as endemic...that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel, instead of radical Islam.” Given the degree to which these comments distance themselves from Wright’s remarks, it is understandable that his subsequent empathy remains partial; an audience member not satisfied with this response is either looking for extremely melodramatic Anti-Wright rhetoric or applying what Booth calls “motivism” (24) to Obama’s rhetoric, assuming that the remarks are intended to conceal a hidden agenda. The effort to “win over” as many audience members as possible with this nuanced technique requires a degree of separation from such audience members.

The next partial separation Obama applies is between the benevolent actions of Reverend Wright that he witnessed as his congregant and the aforementioned inflammatory “snippets.” The orator gives elaborate detail of his spiritual mentor’s actions, from the abstract (“he spoke to me of our obligations to love one another”) to the quite concrete (“reaching out to those suffering from HIV/AIDS”). The effect is to make it clear that the rhetor “hates the sins (racially-charged speeches)” but “loves the sinner (the speaker),” enabling himself to maintain a high moral standing while condemning the

inflammatory rhetoric. Again, however, Obama's discourse refuses absolutism; there is strong implication that the isolated "snippets" are not representative of the Reverend's overall message, and his subsequent expression of partial (though far from complete) empathy with the sentiments behind even these brief hiccups makes it clear that even Wright's texts are not, in Obama's estimation, worthy of condemnation as a whole. The following sentence makes this quite clear: "I have already condemned, in unequivocal terms, the statements of Reverend Wright *that have caused such controversy*" (italics mine). Through such subtle qualification, the rhetoric here validates the vast majority of Wright's texts, again carefully carving out a Fourth Locale.

The oratory proceeds to describe Wright's church (which Obama then still belonged to) in unflinchingly direct terms, indicating that, even as an active congregant, there are elements he recognizes as unembraceable: "Cruelty," "shocking ignorance," "and yes, the bitterness and bias that make up the black experience in America." The overall effect is to enable his audience to both understand his relationship with Reverend Wright, who is in this passage presented as "containing within him the contradictions-the good and bad-of the community that he has served diligently for so many years," and that this relationship has decided limits.

Wright discovered the limits of Obama's embrace one month later, when he responded to "A More Perfect Union" in an address to the National Press Club, charging Obama with saying in this speech what he had to say "because he's a politician" (again, this is "motivism" according to the Boothian understanding of rhetoric), and, more insanelly, implying that the U.S. Government was capable of "inventing the HIV virus as a means of genocide against people of color." Obama swiftly divorced himself from

Wright completely. David Plouffe explains Obama's motivation here: "He could no longer stand by him (Wright)-the reverend had crossed a line and permanent separation was the only acceptable recourse" (225). Obama's language in this situation, indicating that "the man I saw yesterday is not the man I knew for 20 years" (Plouffe 225) is telling; the prior separation of sin/speech and sinner/speaker has been disbanded. Even here, however, we can note Obama's refusal to condemn the "Prior Wright." Instead, he isolates the cause of permanent separation to the "New Wright"; only this rhetor and rhetoric are refused understanding. Given this distinction, The Fourth Locale is found again, even within "permanent separation."

The occasional inability to maintain his typical, partial empathy with some of the polarizing figures he comes into contact with (presented via The Empathy Technique) is far from unprecedented in Obama's rhetoric. In *Dreams from My Father*, the author makes it clear that he cannot (in any way) understand "the stark nihilism that drove the terrorists that day (9-11), and that drives their brethren still" (x). In a less dramatic example, his writing later expresses an inability to empathize with an imagined British colonial soldier (this is the only instance in Obama's entire memoir in which his "imagination fails him" {368}). As anxious as the rhetoric of Barack Obama is to prove that "what binds us together is greater than what drives us apart," he is extremely careful to cut his losses when his individual worldview cannot accommodate another's *behavior* (almost always separated from that person's texts). We are, again, reminded of Booth's commentaries in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, as Booth calls for rhetorical analysis that rejects a position only when "one has specific and stronger reasons to

disbelieve” (101). The only individuals Obama’s rhetoric avoids completely are those who fail according to such standards.

This is a very small group of people and discourses (typically, espousing violence and/or conspiracy theories is the easiest way to join this club). The other people and viewpoints Obama’s speeches and writing encounters are engaged, regardless of their less-extreme tendencies toward rhetorical absolutism. The Empathy Technique, in particular, challenges such simplicity in “A More Perfect Union.” Lest this speech be understood as mere intellectual exercise, it should be noted that the author stresses particular choices for both African-Americans and “the white community.” African-Americans, Obama remarks, must “embrace the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past” and “bind our particular grievances to the larger aspirations of all Americans.” Whites, meanwhile, must “acknowledge that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people, that the legacy of discrimination is real and must be addressed.” This is not mere posturing when considered in relation to the aforementioned Zembylas’s urging of “a critical effort to imagine what someone is feeling” (216). Such empathy, Zembylas continues, “makes it harder to dehumanize the Other” (216), returning us to Wayne Flynt’s remark upon abstraction’s tendency to intensify racism. Accordingly, Obama offers a detailed discussion of the harsh realities of race for both African-Americans and Caucasians, in an effort to remove such abstraction. This tactic has resulted in a backlash from some commentators. His aforementioned inclusion of his grandmother’s mild prejudice, amusingly enough, has been one area of negative scrutiny, a portion of the speech which suggests that not everyone is ready (or, perhaps, willing) for Obama’s Fourth Locales.

As part of his nuanced explanation for his close association with Reverend Wright, Obama tells us, in “A More Perfect Union,” that:

I can no more disown him (Reverend Wright) than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can my white grandmother, a woman who loves me as much as she loves anything in this world, but a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed her by on the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe. These people are a part of me. And they are part of America, this country that I love.

This portion of Obama’s speech got Charles Krauthammer chock full of feigned indignation. In his column entitled “The Speech: A Brilliant Fraud,” regrettably published by the generally-estimable *Washington Post*, Krauthammer locks in on Obama for going after his own grandmother: “What exactly was Grandma’s offense? Does he (Obama) not see the moral difference between the occasional prejudices of one’s time and the use of a public stage to spread racial lies and race hatred?” I note two things here: Firstly, obviously, the above commentary by Obama does not indicate that he believes his Grandma’s actions are “morally equivalent” to Reverend Wright’s; he is rather discussing his chosen response to both behaviors (which is to accept the individual, race-related flaws and all). More significantly, if Krauthammer truly believes that the above passage is intended to “morally equivocate” the behavior of all of the individuals mentioned, then one must ask why Krauthammer believes only Obama’s grandmother, and not the collective of “the black community,” deserves an apology. Krauthammer, elsewhere, “sticks up” for Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman (individuals not mentioned in Obama’s

oratory) and Geraldine Ferraro (who, as I have already mentioned, was specifically *defended* by Obama in the speech); it would seem from this editorial that “racial hatred” is a black-exclusive enterprise (that Krauthammer flatly accuses Obama of “little more than an elegantly crafted, brilliantly sophistic justification” of Wright’s comments makes it rather clear that Obama is also a part of this “hatred,” as is Jesse Jackson). I note that no white racists are mentioned in the column. I view Krauthammer as, put generously, one of the “caricaturists” Obama is implicating in “A More Perfect Union”; his willful refusal to admit the complexity of Obama’s speech suggests that The Fourth Locale can be a frightening place for some ideologically-filtering observers.

David Frank describes the specific position arrived upon by this speech quite well: “Obama does not equate the brutal legacies of slavery and segregation with the anxieties faced by the white community, but he does recognize white anger” (185). The partial empathy conveyed by Obama to these ethnic collectives is, as usual, unevenly distributed; the orator maintains a closer personal connection and knowledge of deeper suffering for the African-American “side” of this dichotomous conceptualization. Obama then expands, placing himself inside a collective “we” concerned with “black children, white children, Asian children, Hispanic children, and Native American children,” unifying this “we” as “rejecting the cynicism that tells us that these kids can’t learn, that those kids who don’t look like us are somebody else’s problem.” This is a clever maneuver, because all Americans have “kids who don’t look like us.” Again, however, The Empathy Technique maintains partial separation, as the collective, here, is encouraged to concern itself with those with *differences*.

The same strategy is identifiable in the other two Obama texts I primarily analyzed, which share the similar goal of incomplete identification. *Dreams from My Father*, which traces Obama's evolution into a person who grasps the overwhelming complexity of humanity, presents the protagonist, as a college student, sharing Chinua Achebe's basic perspective on *Heart of Darkness*, but also regarding the novel as a tool for "understanding what it is that makes white people so afraid. Their demons. It helps me understand how people learn to hate" (103), the main character concludes. The now-President, as a young man, is concerned with an understanding of white racism through a novel because "that's the only way to cure an illness. Diagnose it" (103). Of course, such an approach impedes a full, complex understanding, and reflects a character who has yet to come to terms with his own "demons." Later, in his aforementioned capacity as community organizer, he is confronted by a character who voices a slight variation on soon-to-be central conviction: "I don't think our reasons are all that different" (174). This volunteer's comment on her motivation, comparing it to the protagonist's, points toward Obama's gradually accumulating belief in commonality within varied experience. Finally, there is the version of Reverend Wright presented in this memoir, a character who, upon his first meeting with Obama, tells him that "we don't buy into these false divisions here" (283), referring to notions that differing economic status resulted in differing experiences for African-Americans. Wright, of course, comes across as more sympathetic in Obama's autobiography than in the "snippets," but even after the "Audacity of Hope" sermon that greatly motivated the author toward spirituality, the narrative expresses reluctance concerning the church's "sometimes simplification of our (the African-American) condition. It could sometimes disguise or suppress the very real

conflicts among us” (294). The more mature Obama, here, has become a man who embraces his church on the whole, but maintains the reservations he also expresses in “A More Perfect Union”; again the commitment to oversimplification remains incomplete.

“Out of Many, One,” meanwhile, offers the following exercise in partial empathy, ironically immediately after the aforementioned comment that “we’re all connected as one people”:

If there is a child on the south side of Chicago who can’t read, that matters to me, even if it’s not my child. If there’s a senior citizen somewhere who can’t pay for their prescription drugs, and has to choose between medicine and the rent, that makes my life poorer, even if it’s not my grandparent. If there’s an Arab-American family being rounded up without benefit of an attorney or due process, that threatens my civil liberties.

The incomplete empathies are numerous in this passage. The child incapable of reading “matters” to the orator, but the degree of concern is nonspecific. The grandparent’s impact on the speaker’s wealth, likewise, remains a matter of speculation. Finally, the speaker’s liberties are threatened if an *Arab-American* family is rounded up, significant not only because of the unspecified threat-level, but because Obama’s empathy extends only, at least in this isolated passage, to American citizens. By avoiding an obvious possible rhetorical path, which would entail declaring the impact of the struggles of the abstract characters described above as absolutely equal to the potential effect of such struggles on the author’s own children, grandmother, etc., the speaker is able to maintain a discursive distance. This is not a criticism; the rhetoric requires a collective connection

that refrains from becoming exceedingly simplistic, and thus arrives upon a Fourth Locale.

CONCLUSION: USING OBAMA'S FOURTH LOCALES; EXPANDING THE "WE"

A column in the *New York Times* by David Brooks, entitled "Getting Obama Right," represents a certain degree of "Fourth Locale" (it arrives upon a place closer to a responsible attempt at "Understanding Obama" than does, say, "The Muddled Selling of the President"). The author is an admirer of Obama as "the most realistic and reasonable major player in Washington," but details numerous objections to the President's policies, which he characterizes as "four clicks to (his) left on most issues" (A23). The "four clicks" specificity is worthy of note, simply because Brooks chooses the number "four," thus indicating a political worldview beyond simple polarization (which the author charges conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats with having). This final destination, however, has its own limitations: Brooks has a simplistic understanding of the polarities of Liberal/Democrat and Conservative/Republican as "diametrically opposed" and "entirely predictable" (A23), and, as the column's title indicates, regards Obama as fully "gettable." It is in response to these mild shortcomings that I begin my concluding remarks; there is a thick line between easy oversimplification (which is what Obama's rhetoric normally targets) and complex oversimplification, but the connection exists nonetheless. More importantly, the notion of Obama and his rhetoric as fully-understandable entities is contrary to the consistent leaning of his communications, which present both the now-President and America as consistently changing and, hopefully, "perfecting."

I do not mean to criticize Brooks's column too harshly; he certainly paints a more complicated, and therefore more accurate, picture of Obama (and, by implication, America) than the repudiated pundits in "Out of Many, One." That said, returning to

Dreams from My Father, this memoir illustrates that even Brooks does not go “far enough” in understanding the rhetor’s complexities. Consider that this memoir’s protagonist, while in high school, offers a lengthy refutation of his friend’s comment that “Non-Black” girls refuse to date him because they are racist, in a passage full of, (not surprisingly), partial empathy for these young women, steering his friend toward a more nuanced understanding of the situation. The friend responds by telling the Young Obama that “your shit’s getting way too complicated for me” (74). This remark indicates a split between Obama’s difficult-to-grasp persona and his “shit” (rhetoric); this pattern continues as he matures. Focus upon the now-President’s biography and/or policies, as we find in Brooks’s column, will always result in a terminal conclusion, no matter how complex. Analysis of his discursive approaches, however, reveals them to be an unprecedented conduit to new conclusion-drawing, a pathway which, for suitably rigorous analysis, requires its own terminology.

Neologisms, indeed, became a critical part of this project as I strove to define the techniques behind Obama’s rhetoric. It occurred to me while crafting my initial proposal that I needed a verb to describe what his language does to existent dichotomies. I tried “challenge,” “transform,” and, finally, “complicate,” but none of these verbs really got me where I wanted to go in order to express the manner with which this discourse makes a dichotomous situation more complicated, without eschewing the dichotomy. This brought me to “complexify,” meaning to give complexity to an existent language unit. At once, I became hooked on such creativity as a means of understanding Obama’s language: “Unembraceable” became my phrase for rhetoric and philosophies which the author cannot identify with (a small, yet identifiable group); “Boothian” was the term I

came up with to describe rhetoric which suits Booth's purposes in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, as, generally, Booth describes the *purpose* of his prescribed new rhetoric, rather than the specific means through which this purpose is achieved (thus a label must be given to such a method); "Blanding" is a progressive verb I came up with to describe modern political centrism-for-centrism's sake (which, I argue, Obama strives to avoid, just as much as polarization); my personal favorite, "Nuance-neutering," was the term I chose in order to illuminate the problem with Sarah Palin's particular choice of dichotomy use, which encourages its audience to avoid all subtlety; "Transformatives" finally, became my noun for the words, or word clusters, with which Obama "complexifies." Notably, I have here adopted an Obama rhetorical strategy myself; in taking the adjective "transformative" and shifting it to the "neologic" noun of "transformatives," I have here complicated an adjectival binary (Transformative/Reinforcing). By suggesting that something can be "transformative" in its *essence*, I am indicating that Obama's discursive techniques reflect repeated challenges to existing understandings, rather than a single movement from Point A to Point B. Moreover, I am generating new rhetoric from Obama's endpoints, which will be referred to in this conclusion as arriving upon a "Fifth Locale"; this is an example of the rhetorical continuance beyond Obama's dialogue-opening strategies which I have been hinting at demonstrating throughout this thesis. I must now, responsibly, point to a way that Obama's rhetorical techniques could open the door to *many* other Fifth Locales, via the reestablishment of the Ebonics debate.

Mini-Case Study #4: Rekindling the Ebonics Debate

One subject that could easily benefit from an attempt at (re)understanding via Obama's rhetorical strategies is the matter of Ebonics, which translates, literally, as "Black Sounds," and was dramatically misunderstood when it first became visible to the American public on December 18th, 1996. On that date, the Oakland School Board passed an initiative intended, to simplify as much as possible, to use this language system to assist African-American students with their mastery of "Standard English." As this thesis has shown repeatedly, however, simplification tends toward misunderstanding. Sadly, the rhetoric which pervaded (including the wording of the resolution itself) became a lengthy exercise in dichotomy insistence and confusing language choices, one that, I argue, could be mediated through the successful application of Obama's dialogue approaches. I will now discuss how this would "work," in a discourse moving toward a Fourth Locale that favors a Pro-Ebonics result, which I both favor and anticipate would be the result arrived upon following an affirmation-based rhetorical consideration (such as the one advocated by Wayne Booth).

The Alteration Technique would be particularly useful in this hypothetical discussion. Consider, first, the terminology of the debate that requires (at least some) clarification. Firstly, there is "Standard English," around which my quotation marks are not accidental. My thesis committee's linguistic specialist told me, rightly, to remove the unqualified term from my thesis proposal, as without quotes or qualifiers such as "What we call" or "So-Called," the term reflects an inaccurate perception of a certain variety of English as "correct." William Kretzschmar Jr.'s article reflecting upon "Public and Academic Understandings About Language" refers to this assumption as the "doctrine of correctness" (71). The public assumes "that there is a *right* way to speak and write

English, *correct* grammar” (71). Knowing about this English-language misconception is a pivotal first step toward an informed opinion on the Ebonics issue, and this knowledge requires a detailed interrogation of the term “Standard English.”

Another needed, patient explanation coming from a Pro-Ebonics arguer would require clarification on whether Ebonics qualifies as an “English” of any kind. Accordingly, the question of whether Ebonics constitutes a dialect of English or its own separate language system has resulted in the production of a binary of sorts (Dialect/Language) within the contours of this debate. The Oakland School Board’s original resolution stated, for instance, that Ebonics is “not a dialect of English” (143), while its more cautious revision modifies to “not *merely* a dialect of English” (146). On the pages of *The Real Ebonics Debate*, meanwhile, the Dialect vs. Language dispute continues (even in this decidedly “Pro-Ebonics” text, there is no full agreement on this matter³⁷). In this text, it is the commentary of John Rickford (in an interview) which offers the most nuanced position. Rickford makes it clear that he views Ebonics, technically, as a “dialect” and not a “language,” but then quickly qualifies. Continuing that there is “no airtight measure” (59) to determine whether a particular language system should be termed as a dialect or a separate language (and arguing that official decisions on this subject are generally political rather than academic), he then adds that Ebonics is “the most distinctive dialect in the United States, really quite different from other dialects in a variety of respects” (60). We see a commentary which results in a Fourth Locale; Rickford chooses the “dialect” side of this dichotomy, but arrives upon a point that acknowledges the position of those who view Ebonics as a language as “warrantable.”

Finally, with regard to The Alteration Technique's particular applicability, there is the matter of using the word "Ebonics" at all (hardly a sure thing). In my extensive (if not quite exhaustive) research on the subject, I have come across fifteen separate terms for "The Language System Frequently Referred to as Ebonics." With the exception of "Black English," none of the fifteen are explicitly refuted in any of these discourses. Even the "glossary" section of *The Real Ebonics Debate* (entitled, ironically enough, as "Clarifying Terminology") treats Ebonics as synonymous with "Black Language" and "African-American Language" (the three terms share a single definition; 209).

Meanwhile, also in the pages of *The Real Ebonics Debate*, Ernie Smith, credited as one of the architects of the Oakland Resolution, refers to "Eurocentric scholars using the term 'Black English' as synonymous with Ebonics, in doing so, revealing an ignorance of the origin and meaning of the term Ebonics that is so profound that their confusion is pathetic" (57). I note, firstly, that Smith opts to dichotomize Eurocentric/Afrocentric in his text, and then add that numerous scholars within the pages of the same book regard "Black English" as a valid substitute, thus adding further dubiousness to the charge of "pathetic ignorance." I do not wish to suggest that Pro-Ebonics scholarship should limit its terminology in order to more successfully "frame" its arguments. Instead, returning to the question of how the application of Obama's Alteration Technique can help a new conversation, I simply argue that each employed term should be elaborately discussed.

Perhaps, then, it would be fairer for an observer such as I to be referred to as "pathetically ignorant" if I miss something (such absolutist language can otherwise be quite counterproductive).

The defensiveness I just revealed is one I felt frequently while reviewing the positions of many who argue passionately in favor of Ebonics. Reviewing Theresa Perry's explanation of "How Whiteness Functions," for instance, I am told that:

White America, particularly the educated elite, embrace, at least superficially, African-Americans who would not be the kind of writers, dramatists, or scholars they are if they were not rooted in and operating out of African-American linguistic traditions. And at the same time, *these same opinion makers are repulsed by the people, by Black people* (Italics Mine; 15).

Transitioning to Obama's Empathy Technique, I will request here that future Ebonics advocates try a little harder to consider people who, like me, suffer from Whiteness. Passages like the one directly above might temporarily impair open-minded White readers' abilities to consider scholarly arguments in favor of using this language system. Employment of strategic comments such as Obama's aforementioned "I would feel the same way" could save some time for those arguing in favor of this educational approach.

I note also that The Vision Technique has been closely approximated in some of the texts I have observed, with Obama's approach of starting with his own story shared by two of the writers within *The Real Ebonics Debate*, Monique Brinson and Joyce Hope Scott. However, following Obama's model specifically, by communicating the link between a student or teacher's past home life, then linking that experience to the necessity of an Ebonics-inclusive classroom experience, before concluding with the student's successful integration in "Mainstream America" while maintaining a sense of self, strikes me as an almost inevitably helpful approach to a renewed Ebonics debate.

This artful arrival upon a Fourth Locale (in which an Ebonics-trained student finds a specific place between the isolated Black Community and a homogenized collective) is one I actively advocate.

All of these rhetorical strategies are condoned by me, of course, as a rhetorical analyst who knows just enough to place myself *incompletely* on the Pro-Ebonics side of this polarized debate. I will summarize the “Anti-Ebonics” position by first echoing Walt Wolfram’s point that the debate became, largely, an academic/public split. Frank Rich amplifies this point in his column, strikingly titled “The Ebonics Plague”: “There isn’t a public personage of stature in the land, white or Black, left or right, Democrat or Republican, who doesn’t say that the Oakland School Board was wrong, if not deranged” (45). We see not only the absolutist half-dichotomies of “Wrong” and “Deranged” here, but the argument that consensus in the nonacademic community should end the debate (this is the ultimate conclusion of Rich’s column). The irony, here, is that Frank Rich is currently the target of Right-Wing criticism³⁸ for his *New York Times* column stating that “Anger is Rooted in Racism, Not Health Care,” which assigns racial motive to the “Tea Party” and the mainstream GOP leaders exploiting it. That even Frank Rich took such a dramatic, inflammatory Anti-Ebonic stand points both to the problems of the prior debate (which refused non-binary positions) and suggests that the conversation is worthy of being reopened. Following Obama’s rhetorical approaches will, at least, lead participants such as Rich to a more nuanced understanding.

Of course, Barack Obama’s rhetoric demonstrates that he is extraordinarily “articulate” (according to the standards Mainstream America assigns to potential public servants); he also possesses the ability to “Code-Switch” to Ebonic-styled rhetoric if it

suits his particular purposes. The cultivation of African-American students who, like Obama, are fluent in both “Standard English” and their original language system, is precisely the objective of those who favor the incorporation of Ebonics into predominantly African-American classrooms.

Concluding this mini-case study, I am inclined to mention Tobias Wolff’s short story, “A Bullet to the Brain,” a text that went uncited in the scholarship I explored. In this work of fiction, the protagonist’s final rumination before death is upon the pleasures of this “Nonstandard” language system. Part of this pleasure, of course, stems from a lack of familiarity. That the application of Barack Obama’s rhetorical strategies to this debate can result in new, undiscovered territories in academia (via the inclusion of new rhetors versed in this language system), is another argument in favor of a new dialogue on Ebonics.

Consider that I have listed six neologisms (of the roughly ten, total, I used) which I inserted into this writing. These terms, albeit creative, all stem from my particular linguistic framework, which excludes Ebonics. Inclusion of this much-maligned language system into a discussion of Obama’s methods is not only appropriate given his ability to “Code-switch,” it potentially expands the range of future conversations employing the dichotomies that these rhetorical strategies have complexified.

I believe Obama’s discursive choices can also enrich future dialogues in two particular academic fields. Firstly, in the realm of rhetorical analysis, I regard one of the discipline’s potential limitations to be a frequent compulsion toward the visualization of rhetorical situations via simply-constructed triangles, or, alternately, few-sided geometric shapes. Through semi-conscious visual reinforcement, we rhetoricians, perhaps, lead

ourselves to an embrace of the very simplicities that we (at least most of us) deny. This tendency, of course, takes us all the way back to Aristotle. The visual possibilities opened up by Obama and his Dichotomy-Challenging Fourth Locales lead us to a much more elaborate space, one which should, frankly, be formally designed by someone more gifted than I in the visual arts. In the meantime, while I am on my own, this construction is better described verbally and imagined than diagrammed (owing to the borderline-infinite number of Fourth and Fifth-Localed potentialities). Specifically, we would start with a typical triangle, each of its three points labeled in a fashion that makes it clear that each point represents one of the First Three Locales: One represents each of the two “poles” of a rhetorical binary, and the third represents the 50-50 banality, also avoided in Obama’s discursive choices. These three labeled points would then receive an “X,” indicating that Obama’s destinations (and the future dialogues they open) always avoid them, but small enough to leave them available for future discourse.

The designer would then be faced with the impossible (?) task of designating all other potential rhetorical arrival points along the triangle’s three sides, indicating the range of potential inabsolute endpoints. One point would then be designated as the Obama-following rhetor’s chosen destination (perhaps with a star). The artist would then, finally, need to figure out a way to illustrate that this Fourth Locale is conducive to future rhetorical explorations, which again have been designated as Fifth Locales in this chapter. This process can proceed into infinity, provided Obama’s rhetorical methods are consistently employed (and that the communicators in question never become bored).

Returning to a non-visual (and perhaps sane) possibility for future academic discourse, I believe it is crucial for those practicing the interdisciplinary combination of

Peace Studies and Rhetoric to observe and view as instructive Obama's links to Wayne Booth, most specifically the pair's joint refusal of "motivism." When judging the deeds of a particular politician, particularly with respect to international, militaristic policy, there is always a tendency to ponder hidden agenda, as if that individual is not pursuing "the truth as they know it." This is, simply put, contrary to the overall spirit of Obama's work, especially *Dreams from My Father*, which seeks to understand all existent perspectives, no matter how extreme, within the narrator's reality. The author, here (as well as in his speeches), strives consistently to offer as complex understandings as he can, regardless of whether his hard-fought understandings are problematic to the point of provoking outrage in some segments of his audience.

Of course, it compels me to move past the theoretical; given the "Tea Party"-oriented backlash against much of Obama's (never hidden) agenda and advanced intellect, a question is begged: Have the now-President's discursive sophistications done any actual good? Is anyone learning from his dichotomy challenging? I respond that there is a direct, observable tie between each of the "Obama Texts" I have examined and his administration's early accomplishments. To begin, there is the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize, which he was awarded shortly after being sworn in. The committee stressed that "he has *created* a new climate in international politics," emphasizing the role that his "vision" has played in this process and indicating that he has given the world "hope for a better future" ("The Nobel Peace Prize for 2009"). The reference to Obama's rhetoric as generating concrete results, as well as the "better future" mention, reminds of *Dreams from My Father*, in which Obama wrote of America's capability to make such positive choices ("choosing a better future" is, after all, mentioned explicitly in this memoir). Finally,

there is mention, here, of Obama's worldview as "founded on the concept that those who are to lead the world must do so on the basis of values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world's population" ("The Nobel Peace Prize for 2009"). This is, in some respects, an oddly cynical turn (suggesting that only "a majority of the world's population" share Obama's desire for nuclear disarmament, environmental protection, and democracy), but it is a passage which reflects the inabsolutist, "Non-Blind Optimism" we have consistently witnessed in Obama's Texts (such as "Out of Many, One"). The committee's wording is, like that of Obama and Booth's, worded with a degree of pragmatism. A second example of positive effect can be noted in the unusual case of Newt Gingrich's recent rhetorical shift with respect to race in Sonia Sotomayor's Supreme Court confirmation process. Gingrich, according to David Frank's aforementioned article, was one of many conservative commentators to praise "A More Perfect Union" for its ideas (169). Flash-forward, then, to Gingrich's claim that Sotomayor, Obama's first Supreme Court nominee, was a "racist." The term was retracted with the following: "The word 'racist' should not have been applied to Judge Sotomayor as a person, even if her words themselves are not acceptable" (Gingrich). Note, here, the manner with which Gingrich, a notably polarizing politician, has embraced the Sin/Sinner, Speech/Speaker separation drawn by Obama in "A More Perfect Union." While the tenor of Gingrich's column makes it quite clear that he does not hold Sotomayor in the same esteem that Obama (then) held Reverend Wright, the importance of the separation of rhetor and rhetoric even in this piece indicates that Gingrich, who admired the ideas of Obama's speech, has been influenced by it. Finally, the recently passed Health Care bill (which, given the complete lack of GOP support,

might seem an odd item to include here) has produced a third, also positive effect; namely that a Fifth Locale (that is, a Post-Obama rhetorical opening) has been produced. Dennis Kucinich's decision to support a Health Care bill he had, shortly before, refused because it favored insurance companies, has been followed by his promise to continue fighting for reform, stating that the bill was merely a good first step. Kucinich, here, has neither been nullified nor satisfied, but remains an increasingly vocal part of the Democratic Party's health care discussion as it moves forward. We see, here, that from out of Obama's non-polarizing, non-negating discourses (both publicly and privately with Kucinich), a new position is staked out, one that will be spearheaded by a speaker whose political voice is arguably as distinguishable from the comparatively moderate Obama's as an Ebonics speaker's language system is separable from mainstream forms of English.

Consider this in relationship to Mikhail Bakhtin's aforementioned understanding of the "I-Experience" and "We-Experience," "two extremes between which an experience can be apprehended and ideologically structured, tending now toward the one, now toward the other" (1216). The current "We" of American scholarship related to Obama's rhetoric is dramatically limited to that of those with masteries of (what we call) "Standard English," just as the current range of politicians with the necessary clout to be heard has been narrowed by years of extremity and banality. Through the techniques in the now-President's oratory and writing, the range of validity can be expanded, and, thusly, the "We" can also expand. Considering that David Plouffe and Barack Obama have urged supporters of his Health Care bill to "co-sign" the legislation, we may consider "Expanding the We" to be part of *their* objective as well, even if only symbolically.³⁹

Those of us presently commenting on these texts and political issues will need to accept certain discomforts in order to enable this increased circle of scholarly and political participants. Assuming these evolving understandings continue to expand beyond the current limitations of the dominant systems, the “Current We” will have to accept an increasing indecipherability, as, eventually, discourses inspired by Barack Obama’s Fourth Locales will elude us as part of the “Old Guard.” After all, as the field of discourse comes to include increasing numbers of previously marginalized participants (such as those presently restricted by dependence upon Ebonics as a near-exclusive system and those presently outside the limited realm of mainstream political thought), we shall, increasingly, become incapable of “Holding the Floor.” Meanwhile, as Obama’s rhetorical strategy is employed in discourse, the “Now We” must also anticipate backlashes containing the current, predominantly binary understandings which are presently pervasive in our country. It will take a long time to get past the divisiveness of the latest wave of Either/Or framing in political discourse (begun by George W. Bush and his communications staff and amplified in the texts of Sarah Palin), and those of us interested in using the Obama model must be prepared for numerous patience-testing conversations with the Joe the Plumbers of the world (IE: We must be willing to suffer through conversations with already-made up minds).

Rhetoricians who choose to follow in the footsteps of the Obama texts I have analyzed, however, have the resources at their disposal to thrive in the face of these disputes. The Alteration Technique, diversely implemented in (for example) Obama’s Blue State/Red State and Black/White interrogations, his shifting from “perfect” to “perfected” and from first, to second, to third person, and his strategic placement of

descriptive qualifiers (we have seen how the mere addition of “pretty” to “unlikely” has resulted in a vastly different implicit message), has enabled Barack Obama to complicate absolute thinking and arrive upon specific positions. These Fourth Locales can similarly be used to stimulate dialogue on external topics. The Vision Technique, meanwhile, points us in the direction of an understanding of the mass complexities of varied, collective human experience, starting with one individual’s narrative. Barack Obama’s movement toward an understanding of the “widening road” laid out before him plays out successfully on the pages of *Dreams from My Father*; I believe that the inclusion of an identical narrative approach, moving from the experience of the isolated individual to that of an ever-broadening collective, with reflections in between on more narrowly-shared experiences can be quite effective in conversations separate from Obama’s (this specific approach has great potential for narrative-based arguments in favor of Ebonics-inclusive pedagogy, for instance). The Empathy Technique, finally, enables rhetoric which acknowledges without full acceptance, and which posits specific ideas without pushing away dialogues with those who do not share them. In all three Techniques’ cases, a position is carved out which refuses absolutism and, just as importantly, 50-50 banality. This Fourth Locale represents the key to a discourse which is both reconciliatory and reproductive.

In producing such a multi-faceted method, it can be argued that Barack Obama has, through the virtues of his rhetorical strategies, already made a contribution to the world which transcends his presidency’s potential impacts. In *The Audacity of Hope*, he writes that he aspires to “a different kind of politics,” one that “won’t be prepackaged, ready to pull off the shelf. It will have to be constructed from the best of our traditions

and will have to account for the darker aspects of our past” (25). It is, in early 2010, too soon to tell if Obama’s presidency will be regarded as a success. Less ambiguous, however, is the likelihood that a careful reproduction of his rhetorical strategies can produce effective communicative results. For example, 100 years from now (unless my thesis becomes an indispensable part of the rhetorical tradition), it is unlikely that anyone will remember (for instance) Obama’s strategic compounding of “almost willful ignorance” and its implications with respect to the subtle criticism of his predecessor. Observation of such techniques, however, can produce something more enduringly important, namely the effective rejection of dualistic thinking without the absolute rejection of dualisms, enabling rhetoric which both arrives upon specific destinations and encourages further conversation with those who wind up in a different place (provided that this new place winds up being, rather than absolutist or “blanded,” a Fifth Locale).

In the Jewish Passover *Haggadah*, there is a reference to Four Children, and how their current personalities and aptitudes should be addressed, with regard to the retelling of the story of the Jews’ liberation from Egypt. According to the holy text, the youngest child, who is labeled as “not (yet) knowing enough to ask a question,” must be told the story in vivid detail, in anticipation of her/his future speech. The implicit premise behind this imperative, of course, is that this child will, one day, be the sole surviving Passover storyteller. In passing our narratives and understandings down to future generations, I encourage the choice of a better history, to paraphrase Barack Obama, one which accepts past understandings but is not inextricably bound to them, and allows for new openings. The Fourth Locales we strategically generate can open that door.

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NOTES

1. In defense of my admittedly over-the-top criticism, I point, firstly, to the lack of any semblance of qualification in the remark; Palin draws no distinction between “Professor of Law” and “Former Professor of Law,” as if Obama has to grade papers while being briefed on the war in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, her wording fails to contemplate whether all law professors are opposed to the “Tea Party’s” position on this issue (considering that Antonin Scalia is a former law professor himself, and that John Yoo, the author of “The Torture Memos,” is *currently* a law professor at one of the most left-wing activist universities in the country, this seems like a worthwhile matter to consider). I then point out Wayne Booth’s discussion of “knowledge” within *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, in which he proves, fairly convincingly, that it is as “knowable” as anything in the realm of science that the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* is intended to be ironic (120). I believe that using the same intellectual framework Booth uses here is a sufficient strategy to “prove” Palin’s new dichotomy as reprehensibly foolish, at least to the same level of certainty Booth attains for the irony in Austen’s sentence. In short, I feel “academically safe” in regarding the respondent applause as the frightening validation of stupidity.

2. The commentary I have offered here, in which I provide both the explicitly-stated and implied deeper meaning of a particular dichotomy will set the tone for this thesis as a whole. There will be occasions in which I discuss a binary which is explicitly stated, other times in which I point out a dualism hidden (or not really hidden, but rather obviously implied), and some occasions in which I cover both within a single rhetorical

instance. I will not, therefore, be qualifying what does and does not “count” as a dichotomy in most situations.

With respect to the matter of Palin’s implication that, to paraphrase, “the law should serve the war,” I argue that this is among the “Tea Party Trends” for which George W. Bush is responsible. I point readers to the works of Glenn Greenwald, who details the Bush administration’s defiance of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), and, questions the logic behind such behavior, stating that “the FISA court had always allowed the president-all presidents-to do almost any eavesdropping he wanted” (93). He then points to Bush’s potential motive:

He wanted to violate the law (emphasis Greenwald’s) to show that he was not bound by law, that he is more powerful than the law. This is a president and an administration that are obsessed first and foremost with their own power and with constant demonstration of their own strength (94).

Barton Gellman demonstrates in *Angler: The Cheney Vice-Presidency*, that in Cheney and Bush’s worldview, war qualified as the ultimate demonstration of said strength. Certainly, several aspects of “The War on Terror” qualified as part of this strength-mongering.

3. Considering Foss, Foss and Trapp’s accessible discussion, the term “warrantable” might have been coined by Stephen Toulmin. The section in this text discussing Toulmin’s work instead attributes to him the comparable adjective “acceptable” (129) though this descriptor is here applied to “supporting arguments”

(Toulmin 313). The term “warrant,” meanwhile, is present as well, but again seems to be treated as a component of an arrived-upon position, rather than a term for a holistic stance (131-133). I am, therefore, sticking with Booth as the originator of “warrantable” for now (but welcome correction from readers).

4. The best text, in my opinion, with which to gather an understanding of the “Either/Or” nature of the Bush administration and its rhetoric is *A Tragic Legacy*, which focuses on how such thought processes worked, including the rhetoric which expressed them. Specifically, Greenwald regards Bush as subscribing to a “Manichean” worldview, a reference to a religion from the third century, which treats *all* global events as “driven by an ongoing, endless conflict between the forces of Good and the forces of evil” (46). Pragmatism is, thus, useless in all cases. This book is not, strictly speaking, a rhetorical analysis. For an article which illustrates the embracing of binary thinking by the “Tea Party” audience Sarah Palin was addressing (albeit, Palin’s audience was a very wealthy, and therefore limited, segment of this “Party”), see Mark Leibovich’s “The Tea Party Primary” in *The New York Times Magazine* (January 10th, 2010).

5. Much of what I have said here requires qualification. The terms “Left-Wing” and “Right-Wing,” for instance, are not terms I use without hesitation. After all, the entire point of this thesis is to praise a rhetorical style which rejects shallow, easily-arrived upon labels. However, in the spirit of Obama’s rhetoric, I am using the terms because I believe it is constructive to maintain existing dichotomies and leave them available to future scholars, while striving to improve them through qualification. On that matter, I will note that Julian is a “Right-Winger” writing for a Hoover Institution-sponsored

academic journal, while Roxanna Harlow's article is "far enough to the left" to state that "America is a racist, patriarchal, imperialistic power...with or without a black face at the helm" (166). I was with her, to an extent, until that last part.

6. For instance, Obama cannot legitimately be labeled as "antiwar" by anyone paying attention to his comments either before or after his election as president. Back in 2002 in a speech in Chicago, he stated: "I don't oppose all wars...what I oppose is a dumb war." In this speech, his support for both the war in Afghanistan and World War II was made clear. He drew a further separation during his "Cairo Speech" when he stated that the ongoing war in Afghanistan was "not a war of choice" (while reiterating that the war in Iraq was just that).

7. An excellent example of this type of exploration is David Frank and Mark Lawrence McPhail's co-authored article entitled "Barack Obama's Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention: Trauma, Compromise, Consilience, and the (Im)possibility of Racial Reconciliation." In this piece, Frank and McPhail "write together separately" about Obama's breakthrough address, Frank regarding Obama's speech as a potentially huge moment in the history of race relations, McPhail accusing Obama of "inviting the erasure of race" (582); it is not clear to me after reviewing this article whether or not McPhail views Obama's "invitation of erasure" as a malicious act). The article, while not directly linked to my dichotomy-based exploration, is demonstrative of a "Boothian" approach to rhetorical theory, as Frank and McPhail spend time emphasizing the "warrantable" nature of one another's positions as a reason for validating and debating one another.

8. An example of this form of scholarship is “Political Economy and Rhetorical Matter,” a stimulating article comparing the rhetorical responses of Obama, John McCain, and Hillary Clinton to the emerging financial crisis.

9. Another is Deborah Atwater’s “Senator Barack Obama: The Rhetoric of Hope and the American Dream,” a text which contains the sort of Obama-related optimism that Roxanna Harlow found so unfounded.

10. While it is not the focus of my thesis, I am also compelled to discuss, briefly, Zembylas’s article for its interest in the function of “the politics of trauma” for a particular group of people. The peace scholar writes that “The politics of trauma may be identified as an attempt to represent certain historical events in such a way that these events obtain a desired significance in the collective imagination” (Zembylas 209). This (arguably) manipulative strategy, and its relationship to the political strategies of the African-American community, is of major concern to Obama in all of the texts I am discussing in this thesis. This is particularly applicable to *Dreams from My Father*, in which the author spends five pages, in depth, dissecting his feelings regarding Black Nationalism, concluding with an unflattering portrait of the Nation of Islam, yet managing to apply the Empathy Technique I have described above. The author does this by continually expressing understanding for all parties involved, including sympathy for the Nation’s “unfailingly polite” (201) newspaper salesmen, “in part out of sympathy to their heavy suits in the summer” (201).

11. The three texts I have chosen are among the few I could choose from and state safely that Obama and not Jon Favreau or Ben Rhodes (the President’s chief speechwriter

during his campaign and the first year of his presidency, respectively) deserves the title of “author.” Of the three, “A More Perfect Union” is the most doubtful on this subject, but David Plouffe’s *The Audacity to Win*, which does not shy from attributing authorship to Favreau when appropriate, makes it clear that Obama was the primary author (213). In any event, the techniques I will discuss remain a consistent aspect of all of the texts which might be attributed to him, regardless of the authorship question.

12. The sermon in question is entitled “The Audacity of Hope,” also the title of Obama’s second book. In the speech (according to Obama), Wright draws a broad, imaginative path from the biblical story of Hannah, to a fellow pastor’s recollection of seeing a painting called *Hope*, to the global Black Person’s experience. The speech, which contains aspects of what I have called the Vision Technique in itself (292-93), is remembered in Obama’s prose via one of the author’s *own* Vision Techniques: “I began to hear all the notes from the past three years swirl around me. The courage and fear of Ruby and Will. The race pride and anger of men of like Rafiq. The desire to let go...” (294).

13. This simplification, of course, excludes all *other* ethnicities and narrows, inexcusably, our conception of the variant ethnicities which can be potentially included in a more nuanced discussion of Black/White.

14. In his article in *The New Republic*, Jonathan Chait depicts Obama as going against the Democratic Party’s trend toward “Median Voter Theory,” which “in a nutshell holds that the most powerful force in politics at any given time is the voter in the center of the political spectrum” (Chait). Here, this is referred to as a “Clintonite”

approach and attributes its prevalence in the Clinton administration to Dick Morris.

Meanwhile, Obama is quoted in the *Chicago Sun-Times* in October of 2007 as saying that the US had had enough of “triangulation and poll-driven politics” (Obama). Thus, Obama’s rhetoric suggests a disdain for “Median Voter Theory.”

15. Our current “Red State” “Blue State” terminology, pervasive enough for Obama to use it with confidence in 2004, is actually contrary to (or at least occasionally contrary to) the way the “Red State” “Blue State” divide was perceived in the past. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* indicates that “the attribution of the two colors had been the reverse in media coverage of various elections prior to 2000” (OED Online). Republican National Committee staffer Clark Bensen, meanwhile, refers to the inverse of our current dichotomy as “the traditional color-coding scheme” (Bensen). Bensen also alludes to the past understanding of “Red State” as a communist state, confirmed in the *OED online*. While Paul Farhi’s claim, found in the *Washington Post*, that Tim Russert “coined” the Red-State/Blue-State terminology is, therefore, inaccurate, it is reasonable to consider the mainstream media’s role in the development of the current color scheme, as well as Obama’s; as I have indicated, the now-President’s complication of dualistic concepts nevertheless reinforces their core existences. According the *OED Online’s* commentary on the subject, it does seem that the binary’s shift occurred quite recently, which the mainstream media is largely responsible for.

16. Aside from the “Out of Many, One” speech’s famed breakdown of the binary, consider the transformative nature of Obama’s landslide electoral college victory in 2008, which turned “solid Red States” like Indiana and North Carolina into Blue States. For

whatever it is worth, however, a recent commentary by Steve Kornacki at *Salon.com* (regarding Evan Bayh's retirement from the Senate) insists upon Indiana as a "Red State." Old terminology dies hard.

17. Mario Cuomo's recent *Why Lincoln Matters: Today More Than Ever* is an example of Lincoln's continued political transcendence.

18. Along with each of the texts I am discussing in detail in this thesis, Obama's "Yes We Can" and "A New Beginning" (his Cairo address) also employ the collective principle consistently.

19. The four speeches mentioned above use this approach, as does Obama's nomination acceptance at the 2008 Democratic National Convention.

20. Obama, in fact, stood and articulated his plan to Joe the Plumber for five minutes and thirty-seven seconds, and assured him that he would do his best for him even without his vote. Given that Joe the Plumber's situation was, essentially, fabricated from the get-go, this generosity strikes me as remarkable.

It is, however, not an isolated occurrence. Matt Bai's *The Argument*, for instance, details Obama's remarkable efforts to mollify angry left-wing online activists, even taking the time to patiently reply to their individual responses (236-38).

21. ABC has an online clip which provides the full context. I will here include the final portion, sufficient to explain the meaning of the "you":

My attitude is that if the economy's good for folks from the bottom up, it's gonna be good for everybody. If you've got a plumbing business, you're gonna be better off if you've got a whole bunch of customers who can

afford to hire you, and right now everybody's so pinched that business is bad for everybody and I think when you spread the wealth around, it's good for everybody.

22. This is a reference to the film *Chasing Amy*, in which one of the characters attempts to hide the sex of her new boyfriend through the use of ambiguous pronouns. Of course, here my purpose will be to unlock the particular meaning behind potentially ambiguous uses of the first, second, and third-person (collectives).

23. I got this term and its connection to Obama's rhetoric from Robert Ivie and Oscar Giner, in an article entitled "American Exceptionalism in a Democratic Idiom: Transacting the Mythos of Change in the 2008 Presidential Campaign." The article was published in *Communication Studies*.

24. I again steer the reader to *A Tragic Legacy*, which offers an explanation which essentially combines these two possibilities, indicating that Bush's personality and worldview led him to recruit advisers primarily on the basis of their willingness to share his perspective, as opposed to particular acumen (Greenwald 85).

25. I opted to abridge a portion of the above citation, but it is not without significance. The sentence, in full, reads:

I saw that my life in America—the black life, the white life, the sense of abandonment I'd felt as a boy, the frustration and hope I'd witnessed in Chicago—all of it was connected with this small plot of earth an ocean away, connected by more than just the accident of a name or the color of my skin (430).

The “all of it” elaborates upon the American collective.

26. The Grandmother speaks in a foreign language, and Obama’s response is purely imaginative (and rather transparently exaggerated for effect). It is here that, perhaps, the author takes on, sufficiently, Wayne Booth’s definition of “unreliable narrator” as explicated in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (of course, I am here applying a more postmodernist approach in treating this “nonfiction” piece as applicable); this section represents the only part of the memoir which I am *sure* did not “happen” precisely as it is being told. In general, Obama’s text stays closer to an indeterminable point between Booth’s definitions of “reliable” and “unreliable”; of course, as “implied author” of the text, the reader can only, safely, doubt the holistic veracity of the words.

27. Zembylas points out that “self/other distinctions are always blurred because identifications with ethnic (and other) groups are central to self-identity” (210). Obama’s struggles with arriving upon identity can be explained accordingly, though it is through a navigation of the “blurriness” that his Self is finally arrived upon.

28. Although this is not a composition studies-oriented thesis, I am obliged to Peter Elbow’s “Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process” for articulating the challenge I here detect in Booth’s teacher/student interaction.

29. Sarah Palin stated at the 2008 RNC that “being a small-town mayor is sort of like a ‘community organizer,’ except you have actual responsibilities.” Not that I doubt that small-town mayors have responsibilities, but it seems that this particular attack—which is, in its own way, comparable to the comment of Palin’s I cited to begin this thesis in its invalidation of a vocation—would have been better had she listed a *single* mayoral

responsibility in order to back it up. David Plouffe, ironically, says that “despite her stated disdain for community organizers, Sarah Palin had suddenly become one-for us” (314). Note the rhetorical shift here; “community” has been expanded quite broadly.

30. Though criticizing one of the now-Secretary of State’s ads, I must point out Mrs. Clinton’s willingness to adopt her own variation on Barack Obama’s Obama/Collective dichotomy techniques (playing a key role in unifying the Democratic Party in the process). During the 2008 Democratic National Convention, Mrs. Clinton proclaimed: “Let us declare in one voice, right here, right now, that Barack Obama is our candidate, and that he will be our president!” Here we see the collective’s *unification* (One Voice) surrounding an individual (Obama).

31. Penn details the resultant legislation endorsed by Bill Clinton in order to exploit the “Soccer Moms.” The proposals included school uniforms and curbing violence on television. Remarkably, Penn seems completely unconcerned with whether or not this was actually good governance, or merely opportunistic politics (xiii).

32. Plouffe paints himself as a nerd, obsessing weighing Obama’s potential performance in a variety of contexts, including demographics.

33. This is a reference to gentile women exceedingly, prejudicially, inclined to date Jewish men. I assure the reader that this is a relatively small “microtrend.”

34. This is, essentially, a blanket term referring to all American Muslims. There is an offensive implication here; the suggestion is that American Muslims are inherently “more moderate” than Non-American Muslims.

35. A simple majority in the Senate is defined as 51 votes. Bernie Sanders confirms this in a *Boston Globe* editorial entitled “Fight Republicans’ Hypocrisy” (which, while obviously a partisan commentary, has no reason to distort the quantity of votes required for a “simple majority” {it would be *better* for Democrats in 2010 if it were only 50 votes} and is thus reliable on this limited subject).

36. A blog written by political science scholar Tom Schaller and found on *FiveThirtyEight.com* (entitled “Drill Barry Drill”) posits that the decision to lessen the ban on offshore drilling in Virginia was a “classic Obama split-the-difference-with-a-tilt-to-the-left straight out of his *Audacity of Hope* playbook” (Schaller). The blogger’s position is comparable to mine, though he is concerned with policy rather than rhetoric and seems to regard Obama’s Fourth Locales as consistently “Moderate-Left” (to use one of many available terms).

37. Along with John Rickford, whose nuanced preference for “dialect” is discussed in the body of this thesis, the Linguistic Society of America (160-61) also indicates a position not completely embracing Ebonics as “language.” Wayne O’Neil, meanwhile, has a piece entitled “If Ebonics Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is? (*Pace James Baldwin, 1979*),” moving more toward a complete embrace of the “language” belief, which is shared by the book’s editors. Robin Means Coleman and Jack Daniel’s “Mediating Ebonics” article is one of many which articulates the variant labels applied to this situation.

38. Along with more estimable editorials, criticisms of Rich’s piece include one by the not-very-estimable Pat Sajak. His “Opposed to Obamacare? You Must be a

Racist” (written for *Human Events*) frames Rich’s argument as one claiming that opposition to Obama’s Health Care bill is equivalent to racism, when in actuality, Rich’s commentary amounts to little more than stating an obvious truth about the “Tea Party” movement: It is mostly white, and that the numerous extremist actions committed by it (and the GOP leaders provoking it) are partly motivated by the fact that *Obama* is not.

39. Plouffe and Obama have used *Organizing for America’s* email list to solicit electronic “co-signatures” for the recent Health Care bill (I use quotes because the gesture is completely symbolic).