

CONTINUING INEQUITY: THE CONVEYANCE OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN THE  
EDUCATION POLICY SPEECHES OF PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

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Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

CONTINUING INEQUITY: THE CONVEYANCE OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN THE  
EDUCATION POLICY SPEECHES OF PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Presented by Thomas William Hairston

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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*To Sarah,  
and Hap, Carolyn, Casey, Harper, Reid, Neisha,  
and Jill, Beth, Andre, Chris, and all of my Phoenix friends*

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this critical discourse analysis is to examine how the political speeches, addresses and statements of President Barack Obama knowingly or unknowingly continue practices and policies of white supremacy within educational policy and practice by constructing education in a neoliberal frame. With his promotion of school choice, quantifiable teacher quality, academic excellence, and the promotion of education as an economic imperative, President Obama maintains the neoliberal hegemony in education. Such hegemony promotes technical rationality. It also continues the institutional and internalized racism felt within and throughout American life. With presidents having the ability to communicate unencumbered with their citizens, the impact of Presidential communication can either set or rupture the status quo.

Through this critical discourse analysis studying the statements and remarks of President Obama in seven speeches pertaining to pk-12 education, there was evidence that suggested President Obama views education as an economic entity that continues the neoliberal outlook of society and the technical rationality outlook persistent in schools. Other evidence suggests that President Obama also reinforces colorblind and individualistic approaches to talking of race which could serve to further embed the institutional and internalized racism in public education.

This research can serve to continue and strengthen educational discussions of the impact of whiteness and racism on public education. While steps are continually taken to ensure legal equality, generational and institutionalized measures are often ignored when discussing race and racism. This research can provide for further conversations on the impact that leaders have on continuing and promoting aspects of racism to their constituents.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the problem**

White supremacy and racism in education are not new phenomena. Instead, they are entrenched within public education settings. Racism in the United States is legitimated through the creation and manipulation of structures and power to help whites gain advantages over racial minorities (Dei, 2001). While this is nefarious throughout the whole of American society, it is especially menacing within the halls of schools. Structures legitimizing whiteness in public schools are interwoven into the fabric of education.

Racism here is not the individualistic bigoted hatred that is often portrayed, but the systemic and structured manner in which society is set up to advantage one group. Racism, like race, is a social construction that has been reinforced through real institutions. It is a fabrication turned into a reality (Leonardo, 2009, p. 124). The social construction and material reality of race has created a dominant group of whites with behaviors consistent “with colonization, takeover and denial” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 118). Whiteness then is a structure that continues domination throughout the system, and will not be stopped by changing or decreasing the attitudes of individual bigots (Howard, 2004).

Whiteness is a social construction which serves to condition people into believing that white is the normal race and that white is therefore superior to other races. Whiteness is an owned identity which gives its owner rewards that help to perpetuate racist mentalities and supremacist viewpoints. Whiteness is both visible and invisible in its power. Even when a white person seeks to disassociate themselves from the dominance

and oppressive characteristics that comes with being white, they are unable to rid themselves of the engrained privileges and stereotypes that afford them privilege within American society. As a minor attempt to minimize such privilege, I choose to not capitalize white or any variation thereof, while capitalizing Black and descriptors of other races throughout this research project.

Because of its dominance, whiteness is “equated with the American civic identity” (Tranby & Hartmann, 2008, p. 347). Whiteness being equated with the American civic identity makes whites normal within America; it also makes other races “excluded from the American identity and ideals” (Tranby & Hartmann, 2008, p. 347). Among the identity and ideals perpetuated as American and normalized by whiteness are liberal ideals of “individualism, equality, and opportunity” (Tranby & Hartmann, 2008, p. 347).

In order for whiteness, and therefore racism, to be dismantled it is necessary to dismantle the current structures and systems reifying whiteness and racism. One such structure is education in its current manifestation. Historically students of racial minorities within the United States have been marginalized, forgotten, and undervalued (Leonardo, 2009, p. 49). Marginalization harms these students in many ways: (1) It provides inferior funding through the legacy of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation (Roediger, 2008), (2) It provides inequitable opportunities through working to limit the possibilities of students' futures (Klaf & Kwan, 2010), and (3) It incorrectly identifies and defines racial minorities and racial minority students as failures and deviants (Downey et al., 2008).

Over the past thirty years, there has been a continual backlash against the gains of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s (Federico, 2006; Gillborn; 2005; Melamed, 2006; Soss et al, 2008). The promulgation of this white backlash fits tightly with oppressor mentalities. Oppression from whites comes in two forms. There is the overt oppression that occurs through constant efforts to dehumanize racial minorities. These overt efforts work their way into the ethics of individuals and groups and can serve to establish discriminatory policies. There is also covert oppression that comes with the “limited consciousness of whites.” Limited consciousness helps to ensure that liberation cannot come from the leadership of white people, but must occur through the leadership of racial minorities (Allen, 2004, p. 124). Limited consciousness is a mentality that forms in any oppressive group that dehumanizes the oppressed (Allen, 2004). Such limited consciousness develops out of the privilege cultivated by the social systems set up to keep whites in positions of power. The power whiteness brings with it provides a constantly reconstructed system of domination that continues “social, economic, political, social control, and ideological mechanisms” throughout the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 9).

The backlash of whites over the past thirty years is evident through federal educational policies concerning today’s schools. In what seems vague and innocuous, but is far more baneful to racial minority students, No Child Left Behind and its successor in Race to the Top continues oppression and dehumanization (Leonardo, 2009). Hursh (2007a) posits that No Child Left Behind “has failed to provide objective assessments, improve learning, and close the achievement gap” while it also promotes “neoliberal solutions to societal problems” (p. 514). No Child Left Behind intends to “accomplish the

implementation of privatization and deregulation” (Saltman, 2007, p. 134). Such intentions help to reduce education to “economic functions” (Saltman, 2007, p. 134). In the United States, the economic viewpoint of education promotes capitalism. According to Mora and Christianakis (2011) the educational policies at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century hand over the public good of education to market capitalism. With capitalism as a main contributor to the dominance of whites within the United States (Apple, 2009), promoting education through a capitalist lens reinforces and continues white dominance, as capitalism stems directly from the creation of whiteness (Roediger, 2008). Current educational policy, therefore, accepts the status quo of the white dominated United States and seeks to reproduce that status quo, if not strengthen it even more (Klaf & Kwan, 2010, p. 205).

Through generations of *de jure* segregation tactics, the United States has become socially stratified. This social stratification has occurred through a historical litany of processes and practices. Whites have been provided advantages through numerous governmental policies. Among these, the Homestead Act which gave whites access to land not afforded to others; the first naturalization law within the United States which imagined the ideal race of America to be white (Roediger, 2008, p. 56); the War Plan White measures that sought to limit possibilities of a racial war (Roediger, 2008, p. 162); restrictive neighborhood covenants where houses in swaths of land were only sold to whites (Roediger, 2008, p. 167); and numerous New Deal Legislation pieces including Social Security, the GI Bill, and The National Industrial Recovery Administration which were all only afforded to white citizens for nearly twenty years after their inception in the 1930s (Roediger, 2008).

The legislative activities of the past still serve as forces in segregation within the United States. The advantages afforded to whites have allowed them to gain and inherit wealth in a higher portion than racial minorities: whites have even been able to keep a similar gap in average wealth between them and Blacks from 1860 to the present day (Roediger, 2008, p. 70). The conservative administrations of Nixon, Reagan and Bush “compounded the racialized effects” of previous legislative history through their emphasis on cutting taxes and their minimal concern with civil rights policies (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 419). With the aforementioned legislation and the conservative administrations during the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it is no wonder that segregation in public schools grew extensively from 1986 to 2000 (Orfield, et al., 2002).

Segregation helps to guarantee that education at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will continue to be inequitable in terms of funding and population inside of schools. Racial minority students are subject to unfair and illegitimate processes under the current education policy (Miller et al., 2008). These include but are not limited to: racial minority students being twice as likely to be taught by the least experienced and least qualified teachers; Blacks with incomes higher than whites are still less likely to attend high quality schools; affluent Black children are still three times more likely to attend schools with low-achieving poor students than are their affluent white peers; racial minority students are disproportionately classified as learning disabled, and disproportionately suspended or expelled for subjective behavior violations; schools with high population of racial minority students have about one third as many advanced courses on average as schools serving a high population of whites (Wise, 2010). Such social stratification helps to perpetuate inequity, and current education policy propels it even more.

The mandated changes of narrowing curriculum, adapting a capitalistic view of education, and devaluing teachers all accompany the current neoliberal education policy. This inundation of thought and coercion is most experienced by schools with high populations of racial minority students (Miller et al., 2008). McCarthey (2008) notes that teachers in low-income and high-minority population schools experience policy as a repressive measure that influences their teaching, instruction, and curriculum. Hollingworth (2009) finds that schools serving low socio-economic students are given less funding and fewer resources which help to further limit academic programs in the schools serving those students. As current education policy is set to continue the status quo, it consequently dehumanizes racial minority students (Leonardo, 2009). This dehumanization occurs through the development of standards (Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2005, p. 40). The standards forced upon schools through current education policy conspire to reify whiteness while acting as if they are non-racialized. When racial minority students fail to meet these white standards, they are then made to believe that the “fault is entirely theirs.” At the same time, when whites achieve white standards, white students are made to believe that “their merit is entirely theirs” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 130). The way that whiteness has worked its way into schools in this innocuous manner is dangerous and shameful. Education policies reify the belief of whites as the ideal American identity through their reliance on meritocratic measures and competitive practices. Schools are forced to make their racial minority students incorrectly believe that failure is an individual manner – and forced to make their white students incorrectly believe that success is an individual manner. Such notions limit the discussion of the

impact that race has had, and continues to have, on all aspects of society in the United States.

The almost invisible aspect of this racialized structure impacting schools needs to be further explained. One way of helping to accomplish that is through assessing the discourse concerning education and race. Through looking at this sometimes “seemingly benign discourse,” a deeper discussion on how whiteness and white supremacy still affect education and society can further develop. It can also help to provide clarity into how the current status quo, even in this era of ‘reform,’ promotes and maintains white privilege (Zamudio & Rios, 2006, p. 484). The power of this president - Barack Obama - as the first Black president is unique. His election allows Americans to believe that a transformational shift concerning racism has occurred; it allows Americans to believe the myth that race no longer matters. President Obama has a role in either furthering this myth or collapsing it altogether. One way to discover the role that President Obama plays in the furthering of whiteness or bringing us to a completely just and equitable society is through identifying the manners in which his discourse communicates a certain view concerning race.

### **Statement of the problem**

Previous research indicates that the President often uses speeches, statements, and addresses to exercise influence. The president has the ability to utilize speeches, statements, and addresses to influence the actions of legislators (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2010a). They also use speeches to communicate policy preferences to citizens, legislators, and bureaucrats (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2010b). Presidential rhetoric can also greatly influence and affect the national agenda (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2004). Through speechmaking the

President is able to set and continue a public agenda (Whitford & Yates, 2003). The President, in setting the public agenda, becomes a point of focus for the public; they will look to the President's leadership to provide direction for the actions they are expected to carry out (Whitford & Yates, 2003). Whitford and Yates (2003) conclude "the power of the President to shift attention by signaling his policy priorities is real and substantial" (p. 1004). This research project will take the same stance.

The 'real and substantial' presidential power evidenced in education policy is not over legislators, as the majority of legislators seem to agree upon current educational policy. The 'real and substantial' power of the President in educational speeches comes over the general public, the youth currently in public education, and the multiple levels of bureaucrats enacting educational policy – from local administrators and teachers, to state educational bureaucrats, to federal educational bureaucrats. The president signals the preferences for policy, whether it be for education or any other platform, through his speeches. These preferences help bureaucrats and citizens "understand his commitment and respond to his leadership" (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2008, p. 119).

This study approaches this 'real and substantial' power through a critical lens. In studying the speeches of the President, this research will examine how the administration sculpts educational discourse and ensures that neoliberal educational theory achieves a 'common sense' status as a guide to educational policies and practices. In ensuring such hegemony of neoliberalism, these policies and practices asserted by the President also reinforce white supremacy and racism within education (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010).

## **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this critical discourse analysis will be to examine how the political speeches, addresses and statements of President Barack Obama knowingly or unknowingly continue practices and policies of white supremacy within educational policy and practice by constructing education in a neoliberal frame. There has been previous research concerning how current educational policies and practices may in fact perpetuate inequity and racism within education (Alemán, 2007; Canfield-Davis et al., 2009; Klaf & Kwan, 2010; Miller et al., 2008). Yet there still exists a gap concerning how such policies and practices are promoted to the American people. Through analyzing the discourse used in speeches and remarks concerning education, a discussion concerning the role the President plays in continuing racism within education can take place and advance into more research opportunities. This is essential in the academic field as whiteness still dominates the classroom, the school, and federal education policy. Whiteness does this by making teachers' unable to discuss race, distributing racial minority students to high poverty population schools unequally, and decreases the years of experience teachers have inside of a high minority population school when compared to high white population schools (Castagno, 2008; Wise, 2010). And this only names a few ways in which whiteness continually impacts and dominates education.

## **Research questions**

In order to complete this study, the researcher will focus on two main research questions to identify how President Obama conveys an agenda that reinforces white supremacy in elementary and secondary public education through neoliberal policies and practices. The two research questions are as follows:

1. What educational philosophy does President Barack Obama communicate through the selected speeches?
2. What aspects of race are communicated through the speeches of education policy of President Barack Obama?

### **Importance of the study**

The critical discourse analysis of the speeches and statements of President Barack Obama is necessary and justified because they not only have ideological ramifications - shaping the ideology of the audience listening to the discourse -- they also have effects on social change (Fairclough, 2003). Discourse changes the actions and the future discursive events based on that change in ideology. As the President focuses the public into thinking of education in neoliberal terms, the opportunity for equity between races in education diminishes. Giroux (2005) asserts that neoliberalism produces inequitable power relations and excludes certain people from citizenship and participation within their community. In the United States, as Roberts and Mahtani (2010) argue, the products of neoliberalism therefore lead to racist ideologies. Melamed concurs with this sentiment and states that the connection between neoliberalism and racism starts by engendering new racial subjects and the further creation and distinction “between privileged and stigmatized collectivities” (Melamed, 2006, p. 1). Unlike in the past, through overt racist structures that occurred through the era of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and the white terror that spread with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups, neoliberalism codes the superiority of whiteness into terms of wealth, political power, and mobility. As the meritocratic tenets of neoliberalism gain traction, those that fail to meet the distinctions of privilege are dispossessed, defined as failures, and subordinated to the

principles and ideals of those deemed to be successful (Melamed, 2006). Through subverting democratic principles into laws of the free market, those with access and power into the market economy fare better. Whites in the United States are granted systemic and historical influence in the market economy, and therefore are able to substantiate their power and control over others through neoliberalism (Giroux, 2005).

### **Scope of the study**

To demystify – and make clear the white supremacy evident - the discourse concerning race and current neoliberal education policies, this research project will investigate speeches and addresses of President Barack Obama in which he addresses educational concerns. For this study I will be assuming, following Whitford and Yates (2003) suggestion, that a President is able to persuade and shift attention on any topic through the promotion of his beliefs and certain policies that help to establish those policies into law. The speeches and addresses of President Barack Obama could help to identify how racism is communicated through educational policy. The longitudinal aspect of analyzing speeches from the beginning of his term to the last speech extensively discussing education will also provide a better chance at developing solid conclusions concerning how President Obama may communicate racism when talking of educational policy.

In order to achieve this, I will be collecting data from seven speeches and addresses given by President Barack Obama. All of the speeches were chosen primarily because they pertain directly to education and the policy agenda that President Obama communicated. Some of these speeches were also important as they were presented to audiences of racial minorities. These speeches not only addressed education policy, but

also how President Obama communicates his views on race. The speeches are each individually identified along with the reasons for choosing them below:

### **Inaugural Address – January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

President Obama's Inaugural Address was a historical moment in the United States. It culminated the election of the first Black president in the history of the country. Friedman (2009) – a day before Obama's swearing - hoped that the speech Obama gave at his inauguration would set the tone for the rest of his presidency – a “radical” presidency. Not radical in terms of left-wing or right-wing fanaticism, but radical in the chance to do something major – to take the momentum that came with the history of the day and parlay it into a ‘consequential’ redefinition of the social contract. Obama, could in theory, at the beginning of his term change how the citizens and government work together to “reboot, revive, and reinvigorate America” (Friedman, 2009).

The reason for inclusion of this speech was not for how heavy the education content was within the speech, but for the overall purpose of creating a baseline for what Obama expected out of a social contract and out of himself as President. The philosophies brought forth in how to be citizens, how the United States would carry on internally, and how it would act globally through the address is viewed as the starting point of Obama's presidency and agenda-making power.

### **Remarks by the President to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on a Complete and Competitive American Education – March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

The second speech chosen to analyze is a speech given less than two months into Obama's presidency. In an address to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Obama used the opportunity to outline the policies and philosophies for education he would promote

throughout his term as President. According to Stout (2009), Obama “used a speech here to flesh out how he would use federal money and programs to influence policy at the state and local level” (p. 1)

This speech was chosen to analyze for the exact reason that Stout lays out. As the crux and foundational speech of Obama’s educational policy agenda, this address is essential and necessary to any analysis of the educational philosophy of the Obama presidency. The audience in attendance also plays a factor in this choice. The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce operates under a mission of supporting and promoting businesses owned by Hispanics. This representation of a racial minority within a United States provides for another level of analysis. The analysis of this speech will not only occur concerning education, but also concerning how Obama promotes educational philosophies and policies that might be racist in nature to groups representing people of color.

### **Remarks by the President to the NAACP Centennial Convention – July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

The third speech from 2009 to be analyzed occurred when President Obama spoke to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s Centennial Convention on July 17<sup>th</sup>. According to the organization’s website, one of the purposes of the NAACP is to “ensure that all students have access to an equal and high-quality public education by eliminating education-related racial and ethnic disparities in our public schools” (naacp.org, n.d.)

In matters of education, this speech is important in how Obama sought to convey his educational agenda to an audience concerned with eliminating racial and ethnic disparities. In matters of race, this speech was important. It was the first time, in Obama’s

presidency, that he spoke directly to the largest organization representing racial minorities within the United States (Thompson & Thompson, 2009). The considerable time he spent discussing both the hardships that face racial minorities and the importance he placed on education within the speech; make this a consequential speech to analyze.

**Remarks by the President on Education Reform at the National Urban League Centennial Conference – July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

Like the NAACP, the National Urban League has a mission to “elevate the standard of living in historically underserved urban communities” (nul.org, n.d.). Like he did with the NAACP, President Obama took the opportunity to address educational concerns in front of an audience of National Urban League members. This speech, a little over a year after the speech to the NAACP and almost a year and a half after his first foray into setting an educational agenda, responded to “criticisms from some minority and teachers groups” (Calmes, 2010). Therefore this speech will be deft at helping the analysis of any longitudinal shift within Obama’s educational agenda. The audience, again, also plays a vital role. Just as with the NAACP and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Obama spent major time detailing his educational agenda to a particular group – a group of members representing racial minorities. This speech will help to discuss how Obama speaks of inequity and discrimination within education to representatives of racial minority groups.

**Remarks by the President at a Youth Town Hall sponsored by BET Network – October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

In October of 2010, President Obama took the opportunity to answer questions from youth at a town hall meeting in Washington DC. This town hall setting was

sponsored by BET and MTV networks and encompasses various parts of Obama's domestic and international agendas. For the purposes of this analysis, there are six questions from audience members and replies from the President that will be used for the analysis. These six questions contain responses from Obama concerning race and/or education. As this audience was comprised of a high number of younger Americans and a high percentage of racial minorities, it will again help to elicit how Obama speaks of education and race to racial minorities.

**Remarks by the President at Signing of Executive Order for the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans – October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

Five days after the Town Hall meeting in Washington, President Obama signed an executive order pertaining directly to education and Hispanic Americans. The purpose of the initiative was to increase engagement between the Hispanic community and “anyone working within the education system nationwide” (Fox News Latino, 2010). At this signing, President Obama delivered remarks detailing the initiative, the importance of the initiative, education in general, and the impact education has on Hispanic and Latino peoples. Therefore, these remarks are necessary to include in this analysis concerning race and education. They will also provide further data for longitudinal analysis.

**Remarks by the President on Winning the Future in Education – March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011.**

The final speech selected for analysis was the only major speech Obama has given in 2011 as of the end of August 2011. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011 President Obama traveled to Boston to speak to an audience of students that attended TechBoston Academy – a charter school located in Boston, Massachusetts. In this speech, President Obama hammered away at “his themes of innovation and education” (Landler, 2011).

This speech will give credence to the longitudinal change or stability of Obama's educational agenda. With the primary focus of this address being on innovation in education, Obama spoke of what the future of education should be about and also, how his agenda would push that forward. It will provide a final piece in the longitudinal analysis of what has stayed consistent and what has changed throughout the seven speeches to be analyzed.

In analyzing these speeches, I will focus on four different components of discourse: representations, assumptions, legitimations, and discursive knots. Representations recognize the discourse of one text, or social event, and bring it into the broader sector and plane of the analysis – in this case, race and education policy (Fairclough, 2003). Assumptions are important to analyze for this research as they help to understand and develop arguments based on the author's ideology and belief structure (Fairclough, 2003). Legitimations work similarly to assumptions. They too work to define the ideology and belief structure of the author and also showcase how President Obama attempts to shape the beliefs of the audience he is addressing (Fairclough, 2003). The final ways in which the addresses will be analyzed is through discursive knots. Discursive knots are the linkages between speeches – the statements and beliefs that are espoused time and time again to turn a statement into a catchphrase – and a catchphrase into a part of the national dialogue (Fairclough, 2003). Discursive knots will be analyzed extensively as part of the longitudinal analysis of the speeches.

I believe focusing my analysis on these four different components of discourse will provide ample opportunities and data to provide an argument concerning the interaction between race and education as espoused through the educational policy and

communications of President Obama. With limiting the scope of this research to concerning how the educational policy agenda is communicated, and doing so through a critical anti-racism lens, I can strengthen research concerning how educational policy may reinforce and institute racism. The data collection and analysis process is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

### **Researcher Identity, Limitations, delimitations, and assumptions of study**

#### **Researcher Identity**

##### **My position in this society.**

The name Hairston is prevalent in the southern part of the United States. It is a European name, a Scottish name, a white name. Houses linked to the Hairston name are on historical registers. The family tree reaches back to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century – and possibly earlier, At least one side of the family tree does. The Hairston family name is also ensconced deeply with slavery and slaveholding. The homes of historical note are plantations. It is impossible for me to run away from white dominance – I am branded with it. To be proud of and contemptuous of my last name at the same time is a struggle. And references to the history of the family name from parents, relatives, acquaintances sometimes provide for tense and uncomfortable moments. Luckily, because I am white, I can still escape.

Escaping for me is the same as any other white person within the American society. I, like so many others, can choose to avoid thinking of my past, of my role in current inequities, and in how I will contribute to future racial injustices. When I become uncomfortable with racial inequalities, with how some people are not given the same

advantages, when some people are left oppressed, I can turn away from it and not have to deal with it. There have been times, far too many, where I have done just that. As I become stronger in my own understanding of how merely being of the white race is enough to be oppressive to others, I seek out ways to improve inequalities. Yet most of these opportunities I take on are still in formal settings. Even then, because of where I am in my own career and life, I sometimes hide in favor of my own future well-being.

Writing about race is one of the ways I seek to stop myself from escaping. I have always found my strongest voice to be through written voice. It is where I am strongest in explaining my own beliefs and advancing my own knowledge. As I continue in academic life, I hope to devote my learning, teaching and professional life to dismantling racism as it exists in American society today. My own definition of racism is one not based on individual bigotry, prejudice, and bias – but on the institutional and structural ways in which the white culture within the United States has systemically developed a racial hierarchy that benefits their own race at the expense of each and every other race within this country and society. My own most personal and immediate dealing with this institutional racism came in my first year of teaching 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade special education in rural Missouri. It was evident that every 9<sup>th</sup> grade Black male in the school was labeled with a learning disability, behavioral disorders, or as mentally retarded. That event was the push I needed to understand that school is not equal for *all* students. My first deep thoughts into racial inequity took place as a teacher inside of a school actively exhibiting racism. That event still drives me today.

Early on in my life I sought out books on human nature, freedom, and overcoming oppression. I found education to be emancipatory and thought school and education was a

freeing activity for all. This continued into my own educational career. I aligned wholeheartedly with education policies of higher standards, quality indicators, aligned curriculums, and the use of achievement to measure how much schools were doing, students were learning, and teachers were changing lives. My own safety and privilege of being successful in school, of being expected to be better and smarter because of my whiteness, told me this was an accurate belief. In fact, I thought so highly of my abilities in working with current educational policy that I decided to explore creating a charter school to showcase to everyone else how to get students to get high test scores and how to narrow the achievement gap. And then I studied and read. And I once again found that education and schools were acting as oppressive institutions. Since that time, and because of my own interest and belief in the need to overcome each and every form of oppression to be truly free and equal, I have worked in understanding how oppression is perpetuated and continued in education and thusly in society. This research project is a direct reflection and action in understanding how racial oppression may continue.

### **My position in this research.**

As Lipsitz (1995) states one should continuously try to end white dominance and establish racial equity and justice. I believe this research project to be an act against whiteness and the dominance of whites within American society. Bonilla-Silva (2010) suggests that an analyst who studies structural racism should work “to uncover the particular social, economic, political, social control, and ideological mechanisms responsible for the reproduction of racial privilege in a society” (p. 9). My intent in analyzing racism is to uncover such aspects and to demystify and deconstruct the ways that white dominance continues. My beliefs on the purpose of researching the

continuance of white supremacy, coincides with Vaught (2009) in that it is not enough to look at individuals, but to “gain insight into the specificities of racism acted out” (p. 585). My research interest in racism and white supremacy comes from a desire to assist in ending racism and to work toward a society where racism is no longer ‘acted out.’ In order for that society to be attained, I feel it is absolutely essential to analyze how white supremacy may be continued and conveyed through the works and words of our leaders.

### **My position as a researcher.**

Like Milner (2007), I firmly believe that “matters of race and culture are important considerations in the process of conducting research” (p. 397). My own racial identity as a white person brands me with white privilege and the automatic oppressive nature which comes with whiteness. In studying race and aspects of racism and white dominance my own experiences as a white person may provide pause for some critics, as it should. Milner (2007) suggests that researchers need not “come from the racial or cultural community under study to conduct research in, with, and about that community” (p. 388). He further asserts that analysts “should be actively engaged, thoughtful, and forthright regarding tensions that can surface when conducting research” concerning race and culture (Milner, 2007, p. 388). I believe that educational policy is a structure that continues white supremacy. And I believe my work as a researcher and analyst is to expose the way that education policy continues the disenfranchisement of racial minorities within the United States (Gillborn, 2006). Any tensions that arise through this research will work to provide me with more learning and understanding concerning race, and may also provide a learning opportunity for others. I also firmly believe that my position as a white researcher, of white supremacy and racism, may ultimately “advance

the research” that will give opportunities and voice to speak against the current racist status quo of education policy within the United States (Milner, 2007, p. 397). I hope for this project to empower my own thoughts, understanding, and knowledge concerning how white supremacy is conveyed through assertions of education policy, and hopefully empower others to begin or continue their own fight against the racial injustice that plagues our current society.

### **Limitations**

As with any research project, there are limitations to this study. First of all, my findings, as all findings of white scholars in articulating anti-racist beliefs should be scrutinized. Without such scrutiny, as a white scholar of the power of whiteness, I may unintentionally continue racist structures and promote the status quo of white dominance within the United States and more precisely within American public schools. My own whiteness is a limitation of how I analyze the discourse. To minimize that limitation, I will have to analyze my own writing and thought processes to ensure an anti-racist stance. More on this limitation appears in Chapter 3 concerning methodology.

Another limitation of discourse analysis concerns knowing the inner thoughts and beliefs of the author being analyzed. It is impossible to know what President Obama truly thinks of education and if he truly believes in the ideologies, practices, and philosophies that he espouses throughout his speeches and addresses. However, that is of minimal importance. It is of minimal importance because what President Obama conveys and portrays to his constituents and audiences is of far more importance than what he believes but will not say. The critical part of the President’s speech is in how it is used to convey certain meanings and policy initiatives to citizens. Therefore it is not necessary to know

his inner thoughts, but in how his speeches and addresses signify his beliefs – whether they are his alone or not.

The final major limitation is the absent knowledge of whether or not President Obama was the true author of the given speech. Often the President is not the person putting pen to paper. There are any number of people that might have opinions and input into the wording and dialogue of the speech. There are significant attempts to minimize this limitation. The first is the inclusion of the town hall discussion on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010. I assume these remarks are more off the cuff on the President's part without direct and immediate input from advisors and speechwriters. Also, I am under the assumption that the President does have final say in his speeches and the content of those remarks. I believe these two assumptions minimize the limitation of who wrote the speech and still can promote the President as the final 'author' of the speech.

### **Delimitations**

This research project also purposefully limited itself in certain regards. In choosing to analyze only the speeches heavily emphasizing education by President Obama, I am foregoing analyzing other important components of federal education policy formulation. The delimitations of this research project however, provide for many opportunities for further research in this same critical discourse analysis vein by me or other researchers. The first delimitation is of looking only at the educational speeches of the current administration. Through narrowing the focus of the research down to the current administration, I can more ably ascertain the beliefs communicated by President Obama and how those may help to perpetuate racism in education. The second delimitation also stems from the first. In only focusing on President Obama, other

members of his educational force are left out. Secretary Arne Duncan and the Undersecretaries at the Federal Department of Education have also promoted components of the educational agenda set forth by the administration. These speeches and remarks were left out purposefully so that the research would solely focus on President Obama's remarks. Throughout his tenure as President, Barack Obama's administration has worked to create and fortify an educational blueprint concerning best practices to increase achievement in schools. This document is beneficial to understanding President Obama's educational agenda. Yet much of the document is given in spoken form throughout the speeches and remarks. The blueprint, therefore, is also purposefully left out so the research can focus only on speeches and remarks given in front of an audience. Unlike a written document such as the blueprint, speeches that are highly visible, as Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2004) suggest, give the President the "best opportunity to affect the systemic agenda" (p. 182). With an audience looking to the President for leadership, the President can utilize speeches to effectively set and expand his agenda as they will help to achieve the goals of his administration (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2010b).

The final delimitation also concerns looking only at the speeches chosen for examination. All speeches to be analyzed occur during Obama's first term as President. This was done on purpose. Through looking only at speeches occurring within the foundational years of Obama's first term as President, I help to assure that I am looking at the foundational baselines for the educational policy that Obama wants to set forth and construct. Therefore, this research will only concern speeches that Obama gave prior to September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 concerning education. After September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, President Obama did continue to give speeches concerning education, but those speeches occurred close to

or on days that Congress was discussing the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. There is a possibility that his statements concerning education on those dates could have been to influence Congress and not the citizenry which this research wishes to focus on. Stopping at September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 ensures that the immediate conversations regarding the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will not have the possibility to interfere with the message President Obama is conveying to his audience. On a similar note, none of President Obama's campaign speeches will be analyzed through this research. I am only concerned through this research project to understand how the first Black president communicated his educational policy to audiences while President of the United States, not during his time as Senator of Illinois or as candidate for the Presidency.

### **Assumptions**

It is my belief that a neoliberal philosophy within education harms the ability for students to experience equitable and socially just learning environments. I believe that the tenets of neoliberal practices, policies, and philosophy within public education undermines the learning of children for the growth of businesses and corporations.

The three fundamental properties of the Neoliberal educational theory – commoditization – meaning the influence of private sector on the public good of education, accountability – meaning the methods and consequences in which districts, schools, and teachers are evaluated for student success, and standardization – meaning the development of rigid outcomes each and every child is expected to meet form a hegemonic relationship that creates inequalities among states, schools, and children. In the past decade Neoliberal educational theory has become entrenched within federal

educational policies because of the No Child Left Behind Act and Race to the Top. All three tenets now viewed as “common ground” - which according to Fairclough (2003) means the shared meanings that can be taken as a given - across American communities limit educational opportunities into economic pegs. Students are not seen as future thinkers, not as future citizens, but as future economic machines, consumers, and servants. These tenets also provide for a widening schism within the American society: a schism that divides citizens between those who are economically (and therefore educationally) privileged and those who never will be. This hegemonic formulation of public education is inherently antagonistic to continuing the democratic ideals on which this nation was founded. As Giroux states, “neoliberalism does not merely produce economic inequality, iniquitous power relations, and a corrupt political system; it also promotes rigid exclusions from national citizenship and civic participation” (2005, p. 14).

Another critical assumption that I am coming into this research with is that racism is a historical, social, and economic problem within the United States. It is because of this belief that I come into this research with a set viewpoint of critical anti-racism. As Howard (2004) suggests, “critical anti-racism insists that the phenomenon of racism is a structural one” and “one that is much less about individual prejudices and stereotypes than about the way that power is distributed along racial lines to produce and reproduce inequity.” Such a viewpoint requires certain principles to be upheld within my research. First, I have to consistently self-assess my own whiteness and how it might be affecting my thoughts and practices concerning this research. I also must be committed to not only assessing my own whiteness, but also work to decentralize the power of whiteness within the full society. Whiteness as a power center continues Blackness as a disempowered

location. To overcome that stratification, any structure that legitimates whiteness must be dismantled and discontinued. The dominant nodes of individualism, competition, and meritocracy are included within this racialized structure (Howard, 2004). This research project is meant to continue the battle between decentralizing white power and resisting the status quo of whiteness within education.

Inside of education, critical antiracism also requires a set of principles and assumptions to provide for a quality research project. One of the assumptions within this research is that current educational policy is racist. Racist educational policies however are not changed through words and actions alone – instead they are changed through dismantling the structures that embody those policies (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). In order to do this, this research relies on the idea that racial oppression needs to be brought forward as one of, if not the major issue, concerning public education today.

The current neoliberal practices within education limit the number of inclusive strategies that schools and educational centers can do to “counter-act white racism and dominance” (Dei, 2001). It is of my belief that the dominant practices of neoliberal education – marketization, privatization, and accountability in its current forms – must be broken in order to abolish racism within schools and education.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **Education since 1965**

#### **Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965**

In January of 1965 Lyndon Johnson called on Congress to allow federal assistance to the needs of educational institutions. The first solicitation came in the State of the Union message on January 4<sup>th</sup>. In his State of the Union message, President Johnson proposed “to begin a program in education to insure every American child the fullest development of his mind and skills” (Johnson, 1965, p. 5). Johnson (1965) stated that in the few days after the State of the Union he would propose a recommendation that would authorize a substantial amount of money to “help at every stage along the road to learning” (p. 7). This recommendation came eight days later on January 12<sup>th</sup>. Built on the idea of “full educational opportunity,” the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 would lead to an educational system that was “restudied, reinforced, and revitalized” (Johnson, 1965, p. 21). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Johnson proposed it, was based on four pillars. First, bringing “better education to millions of disadvantaged youth who need it the most;” second, putting “the best educational equipment and ideas and innovations within reach of all students;” third, advancing “the technology of teaching and the training of teachers;” and fourth, providing “incentives for those who wish to learn at every stage along the road to learning.”

By the end of April of 1965 the Act had been ratified by Congress and brought with it a major increase in federal involvement in education. Superfine (2005) suggests “the passage of the ESEA in 1965 further broadened the federal role by targeting federal

funds toward disadvantaged students” (p. 13). McKay (1965) asserted at the time of its passage the “enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 will, without question, go into the books as the most significant educational achievement of any Congress in this century, indeed if not in the entire history of the nation” (p. 427).

### **A Nation at Risk**

A Nation at Risk is a document that came out as the end report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education created by Terrill Bell, the Secretary of Education, under Ronald Reagan (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The purpose, as The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) writes, of the Commission was to “help define the problems afflicting American education and to provide solutions.” The Committee consisted of eighteen people, three of which were principals, and only one who had been a teacher. The rest were affiliated with universities, city school boards, state school boards, and corporations (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report opened by asserting that America’s “once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world” and indicated that public education was a chief contributor to the risk that was facing the nation (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The document, while never an official part of any policy, influenced debates concerning education across the country and what was best for schools. Hollingworth (2009) asserts that A Nation at Risk helped to solidify the idea that individual achievement tests were the best way to identify student and school success. Eppley (2009) views it as raising unwarranted questions and concerns about teaching quality within American schools. Superfine (2005)

posits that it also introduced the idea that core curriculums across districts and states were necessary. The results of this document, while never official policy itself, have been consistently found in federal education involvement ever since its release in 1983.

### **America 2000**

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush's administration met with the governors of the fifty United States and together they adopted six national educational goals. America 2000 was then brought forth the following year as a strategy to, by the year 2000, reach the six national education goals that are as follows: (1) "all children in America will start school ready to learn," (2) "the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent," (3) "American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy," (4) "U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement," (5) "every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship," and (6) "every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning" (US Department of Education, 1991, p. 9).

To achieve these goals, America 2000 called for four intertwined strategies. The first relied upon accountability measured through results on national standardized tests (US Department of Education, 1991). The second relied upon the invention and establishment of "New American Schools" which would "achieve a quantum leap in

learning” (US Department of Education, 1991, p. 15). The third sought to challenge adults to go back to school and continue their own learning (US Department of Education, 1991). And the fourth sought to get every community to adapt the national education goals as their own and develop their own progress monitoring of the learning taking place in their school (US Department of Education, 1991).

Ultimately America 2000 was never adopted, but still had impacts on future education policy. Schwartz and Robinson (2000) suggest that “it legitimized the idea of national standards and tests as a public policy issue” (p. 177). Sewall (1991) noted that it reenergized debates concerning school choice. And Howe (1992) suggested that it turned a blind eye towards systemic structural issues of poverty and race. Each of these policy issues and avoidances are still influential in education policy today.

### **Goals 2000**

Though A Nation at Risk was a report, its principles were legislated as the Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1994 and as the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 (Eppley, 2009, p. 5). The legislation of Goals 2000 (1994) stated the Educate America Act was initiated “to improve learning and teaching by providing a national framework for education reform.” A 1998 report by the Department of Education defines the purpose of Goals 2000 as helping “states and communities realize the national commitment to improving education and ensuring that *all* children reach high academic standards” (p. 1). Superfine (2005) asserts that Goals 2000 helped states in building “their own standards and assessment systems” and allowed “for increased financial flexibility at state and local levels in exchange for submitting to certain accountability measures” (p. 10). By writing legislation strengthening these components, federal political involvement in education

was legally changed. With Goals 2000 signed into legislation, there was “a greatly expanded federal role” in education and there was an accompanying shift to the promotion of “school reform and improved student academic performance through the imposition of standards and accountability measures” (McGuinn, 2006, p. 217).

Orfield (1999) suggested that the aspects of school reform were based on “standards-based reform” which he argues is a “reassertion of tradition” based on “more course requirements, more tests, and in many cases, holding students back on the basis of test results” (p. 583). Schwartz and Robinson (2000) also suggested that standards-based reform work with the market pressures and competition aspects employed by rhetoric in *A Nation at Risk* and *America 2000* to make accountability initiatives and the implementation of standards “even more necessary” (p. 173). By introducing federal legislation based on standards-based reform and accountability measures, the federal government under the legislation of Goals 2000 held “states accountable for educational policies over which the states previously had full control” (Superfine, 2005, p. 17).

### **No Child Left Behind**

The federal role in education was again markedly increased during the George W. Bush administration (Henig, 2009). In 2002, President George W. Bush’s Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, wrote that the No Child Left Behind Act “embarked on a new era in how we educate our children and how the federal government supports elementary and secondary education” (US Department of Education, 2002, p. 3). According to the Department of Education (2002) the act relies on four components to propel federal control of public education. The first of these components is based on accountability measures. No Child Left Behind requires states to “create annual assessments that

measure what children know and can do in reading and math” from third grade to eighth grade. These assessments are based on “challenging state standards” and are “designed to help all students meet high academic standards” (US Department of Education, 2002, p. 9). The second harkens back to Goals 2000 – increasing flexibility in the use of federal funds “in exchange for greater accountability for results” (US Department of Education, 2002, p. 9). States, through the beneficence of the federal government are allowed back some of their original power in decision making, if they can produce “evidence that they have content and achievement standards and aligned assessments, school report card procedures, and statewide systems for holding schools and districts accountable for the achievement of their students” (US Department of Education, 2002, p. 9). The third component of No Child Left Behind made school choice available to “parents with children in schools that fail to meet state standards for at least two consecutive years.” The US Department of Education (2002) suggests that school choice “not only help[s] to enhance student achievement but also provide an incentive for low-performing schools to improve” (p. 11). The fourth component of No Child Left Behind centers on providing federal funds to assist “programs and teaching methods that improve student learning and achievement” (p. 11). These programs and methods are defined as “scientifically based” and quantifiably measured as successful in enhancing student achievement (US Department of Education, 2002).

No Child Left Behind strengthened concerns of equity, fairness, and the purpose of federal government in education. McGuinn (2006) asserts that No Child Left Behind replaced educational policy designed to encourage equity. Hyslop-Margison and Dale (2005) suggest that No Child Left Behind’s emphasis on scientific-based programs and

methods is dogmatic and “fails to distinguish between observable facts, or propositions, and the subsequent interpretation of those facts” (p. 35). Saltman (2007) posits that No Child Left Behind was “designed to accomplish the implementation of privatization and deregulation” (p. 134). Hursh (2007b) in summation of No Child Left Behind suggests that “its emphasis on efficiency and individualism” works to “divert attention away from the social issues that need to be solved” (p. 306). Looking back at Secretary Paige’s statement, No Child Left Behind was a seminal shift in how education within the United States works, but that shift has been away from the equity and fairness that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 sought to build as the responsibility of the federal government in supporting education.

While initiated by different Presidents, who themselves come from both sides of the political aisle in American life, these foundational pieces of education policy and thought from the last forty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century worked to develop economic standards, support school choice, define teacher education and quality, and emphasize academic excellence. In connotations those can be seen as positive, or at least neutral in their aims, yet in reality they are more pernicious. Together these pieces of education policy and thought have alienated schools from their places in the public sphere, narrowed the purpose of education, increased stress and punishment upon students and schools, and perpetuated racial disparity within education.

### **Efforts on Development of Economic Standards**

#### **A Nation at Risk as the spark for developing economic standards**

A Nation at Risk, written by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, relied on a corporate paradigm to explain how education played a role in the

strength or weakness of the economy and used that paradigm to impact how education looks within the United States. *A Nation at Risk* cited transforming education as a necessity because of “the economic implications” of public schooling (Hollingworth, 2009, p. 317). *A Nation at Risk* “argued that the nation’s failure to keep pace with the educational system of Japan - whose economy had become the envy of the world - had put its future at risk” (Hess & McGuinn, 2002, p. 81). Reagan used the *A Nation at Risk* report to assert “that the poor performance of the education system imperiled the nation’s economic security” (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 175).

To improve performance, Goldberg (1984) asserts that the “Commission’s central message is that if you care about your country, you must care about your country’s schools” (p. 15). One of the conclusions of the Commission upon publication of *A Nation at Risk* was that communities, states, and the country did not have high expectations of schools (Goldberg, 1984). In order to ensure high expectations of schools, *A Nation at Risk* sparked “a renewed emphasis on educational accountability at the federal, state, and local levels” (Hansen, 1993).

*A Nation at Risk* began the deluge of corporate involvement in public schools and educational policy (Staton & Peeples, 2000). The Commission, according to Walden (1992), used the public schools as a scapegoat for American industry not meeting the productivity necessary to be competitive in a world economy. Hunt and Staton (1996) concluded that through such scapegoating, the economic pressures facing the United States at the time of *A Nation at Risk* led to emphasizing “productivity over equality and liberty” inside of public education (p. 285).

### **America 2000 moving economic standards forward**

America 2000, while not successful legislatively, advanced the standards-based movement (McGuinn, 2006). One of the main goals of America 2000 was the creation of national standards and national tests in ‘core’ curriculum areas (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000). America 2000 sought to have states create tests that would measure student performance in curriculum areas of English, geography, history, mathematics, and science (Bush, 1991). Sewall (1991) found that the ideas set forth in America 2000 were “based on the assumptions that the U.S. requires ‘a new standard for an educated citizenry’ and ‘must become a nation that values education and learning’” (p. 204). In America 2000, the business community was given the rights to determine standards for public schools to use in the everyday classroom learning to build ‘a nation of learners’ (Lewis, 1991). Business leaders and policy analysts supported America 2000 as it sought to eliminate “social engineering,” “curricular innovations,” and “human therapies” that arose from public education in the 1960s (Sewall, 1991, p. 205). America 2000 and its emphasis on creating national standards and assessments “legitimized the idea of national standards and tests as a public policy issue,” and these standards were based on the beliefs of business leaders and policy analysts (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 177).

### **Goals 2000 provides a path for standards-based reform**

President Clinton continued the efforts to closely align federal educational policy to the interests of the economy (McGuinn, 2006). Much of the proposals issued through President Clinton’s Goals 2000 proffered up the idea that national standards and tests were desirable (Henig, 2009; Schwartz & Robinson, 2000). Goals 2000, at its core, was designed to “provide support” for the use and implementation of national standards

(Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 180). Through Goals 2000, states garnished federal money for developing standards and “submitting to certain accountability measures” (Superfine, 2005, p. 10). Superfine (2005) asserts that Goals 2000 made “standards, assessments, flexibility, and accountability” the “key components” for the best educational system for Americans (p. 10). Goals 2000 moved state and national education even further towards being completely based on economic standards.

Goals 2000 also significantly impacted the redesign of funding sequences concerning federal education policy (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000). A 1994 Revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, based on the proposals of Goals 2000, made it impossible for states to receive any Title I funding if that state did not work to develop “standards, assessments, and accountability systems” (Superfine, 2005, p. 18). Therefore in the time between 1994 and 1999, forty-eight out of the fifty United States had developed content standards. Previous to 1994, only 19 states had such standards. Schwartz and Robinson (2000) found that the success of Goals 2000 in the distribution of funding and resources and the changes made from that funding, set the precedent for No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top by coercing states and districts to buy into “the underlying principles of standards-based systemic reform” in order to gain the money the federal government made available (p. 181).

### **Economic standards in education, George W. Bush, and No Child Left Behind**

George W. Bush and his victory of passing the reauthorization of ESEA in the form of No Child Left Behind, while getting much of the attention for impact on schools, only served to continue the thought process of education serving as a tool for the nation’s

economic progress and success. Hursh (2007a) asserts that No Child Left Behind promoted the use of “privatization, markets, and competition” to solve and patch inequities and problems within society (p. 514). McGuinn (2006) states that No Child Left Behind continued the transformation of the responsibilities and role of federal government in education through the same processes used by the administrations of President Reagan, President G.H.W. Bush, and President Clinton.

### **Impact of standards-based education**

In the past, education was formed to in part prepare students for citizenship within this American democracy, yet over the past thirty years that focus has eroded in favor of increased economic focus (Orfield et al., 2002). Leonardo (2009) finds the economy playing a key role in shifting the function and purpose of education. The public through the current education policy focus perceives “that what really counts in education is preparing children for the world of work: what really matters is regaining our competitive edge” (Eisner, 1992, p. 723). The current federal education policy is based on “improving the ‘quality’ of American education and the competitiveness of American workers in the post-industrial global economy” (Orfield, 1999, p. 582). Margison (1999) asserts that the role of education is seen by the national government as purposed to generalize “the skills of globalization” and to “usher in a new wave of economic prosperity” and economic success (p. 29). Standards and assessments used for efficiency purposes “can be argued to be predicated upon the idea that both individual worth and the worth of education” is simply economic (Welch, 1998, p. 158).

The development of standards, according to Lipman and Haines (2007) “helps guarantee the success of schools approved by the corporate sector” (p. 493). Schools in

their current manner are imposing “business and market principles of efficiency” which distorts “principles of social justice and equality, towards ones of economics and business management” (Welch, 1998, p. 171). Many concerns of education stem from low scores on standardized tests and those indicating “a threat to long-term economic success” for the United States (Orfield, 1999, p. 587). Giroux and Giroux (2006) suggest that current trends in federal education policy will enable white business and industry leaders to command power over a majority of publically educated minority workers trained to serve only economic purposes.

The current model of education prepares children “for successful participation in the economic life of the middle class” and the outcomes of education of “rote learning” and “regurgitation of facts” work well to further the US economy by inculcating students with the ability to do one’s job and follow orders (Luker et al., 2001, p. 994). Eisner (1992) states “standardization is one way to judge meritocracy” (p. 723). In using standardization to judge success and worthiness of students, many policy makers fail to consider that the judging is taking place with vast inequalities placed upon select students (Eisner, 1992). Luker et al. (2001) state that using academic standards and tests to promote competition as a means to academic excellence has major consequences including increased economic inequality and the development of racial bigotry.

## **Efforts to Support School Choice**

### **The two President Bush and their commitment to school choice**

George H.W. Bush, by the end of his tenure as president, consistently adopted language showing a commitment to using markets for educational purposes and was firmly entrenched in the creation of voucher policies to allow school choice (Henig,

2009, p. 288). George H.W. Bush (1991) asserted that “educational choice is one of the most important tools that communities can embrace in their pursuit of educational improvement” and he sought through legislation to allow for parents to make “educational choices for their children” (p. 295). The legislation of choice that George H.W. Bush sought also gave increased funding to local school districts if they “implemented programs in which parents are permitted, and given sufficient financial incentives” to use choice mechanisms to determine the schooling of their child (Bush, 1991, p. 295). The first President Bush also advocated “school vouchers to allow publicly available money to be used for private K-12 education” (Hollingworth, 2009, p. 318). Through legislation, President Bush sought to “expand parental choice to include private schools in the competition” that had become education by the 1990s (Sewall, 1991, p. 206).

While President George H.W. Bush’s legislative goals in allowing school choice to enter into educational policies ultimately dissolved without any legislative support, President George W. Bush was successful in developing school choice parameters through No Child Left Behind. No Child Left Behind and the second Bush Administration promoted “charter schools, choice, and the use of private management organizations as contracting partners to reconstitute failing schools and districts” (Henig, 2009, p. 289). No Child Left Behind contained a “grand bargain” which “increased federal spending and activism on education in exchange for expanded flexibility, accountability, and choice” (McGuinn, 2006, p. 218). No Child Left Behind according to Hursh (2007a) is concerned with introducing “a market-based system” into public education (p. 503). It is for these matters which Saltman (2007) posits that No Child Left

Behind was “designed to accomplish the implementation of privatization” through covert manners (p. 134).

### **The outcomes of market-based educational policies and school choice**

Vouchers, tuition tax credits, charter schools, and transferring within a district are all examples of a market based education system and are all examples of school choice (Harris & Herrington, 2006). School choice is impacted by “political pressure and political institutions” (Henig & Macdonald, 2002, p. 977). Zhang and Yang (2008) find that school choice efforts “may be adopted simply because they have been adopted by others, regardless of whether or not they” actually provide better schools or learning opportunities for students (p. 587). Schwartz and Robinson (2000) assert that the use of “market pressures” further encourages accountability through state standards in order to “track the use of public funds” and how they are spent across school options (p. 173). Giroux (2001b) claims “the market is now seen as the master design for all pedagogical encounters” (p. 84). For market based education to work, there must be a commitment to measuring performance of schools and school quality. When school quality is measured inaccurately, school choice also develops inaccurately (Downey et al., 2008).

Buddin and Zimmer (2009) suggest “charter schools may only have limited implications for reforming education generally” (p. 842). Saltman (2007) found that the “closing and reopening of schools” by turning them into privatized market-based endeavors, allows for the circumvention of federal progress requirements mandated through standardized tests (p. 136). Buras and Apple (2005) suggest that the evidence from research does not back up claims by those supporting school choice “that market-based educational schemes compel schools to be responsible to communities” (p. 556).

When performance measures are included within a school choice policy, schools often seek to allow their selective enrollment policies to strengthen their performance and therefore “their market position” (Lubienski, 2006, p. 339). Schools in a market based system “respond to standardizing forces” instead of truly “innovating and diversifying” (Lubienski, 2006, p. 340). Garda (2011) states that charter schools are often “instituted to spawn innovation and for educational breakthroughs to be shared among schools. Yet when placed into a market based system, charter schools and all other schools are determined to find “trade secrets to defeat competitors as occurs in the economic free market.”

Successful schools, whether they be private, public, or charter, are more similar than different – despite calls that school choice will provide the opportunity for competition and innovation to diversify schooling. In a study by Buras and Apple (2005) they concluded that “high-income public and private schools encounter more demands from parents and that public rather than private schools are more likely to be responsive” which goes against assertions made by choice proponents that school choice provides more accountability to parents (p. 554). Zimmer and Buddin (2007) find that “the school attribute that most consistently predicts performance is parental involvement” (p. 270). Even in privatized schools, the amount of resources and funding needed depended upon the economic prowess of the families that populated the school (Bancroft, 2009). School choice, in research by Klees (2008), does not seem to lead “to any expansion of schooling or improvement in school quality,” and therefore school choice is not providing the innovations or achievements that it was assumed to do (Klees, 2008).

While the innovations and achievements that are purported to come with market-based education and school choice seem to be lacking, there is one group that ultimately benefits from the school choice movement. The first time school choice was implemented within the United States was after *Brown v. Board of Education* for the purpose of allowing “white families to continue the racist behaviour of sending their children to white-only schools” (Klees, 2008, p. 322). Likewise in today’s society, school choice, in some cases, is implemented to keep a city populated with white middle-class citizens, by giving parents an option away from “working-class and low-income students and students of color” (Lipman & Haines, 2007, p. 492). Renzulli (2005) finds that in school choice models, competition based on school status involves whites believing that a school occupied by a percentage of nonwhite students is lower in status. Klaf and Kwan (2010) posit that “privileged parents who believe they are entitled to better schools are in a position to maximize the educational advantage of their children by exercising choice in ways that exclude the ‘other’” (p. 205). Klees (2008) finds evidence that suggests the privatization of schooling increases “inequities” (p. 324). School choice, while possibly not serving the purpose of increasing achievement or innovation, does strengthen the interest of the dominating class (Buras, 2011).

Through current educational policy the ability to develop school choice models is left up to states. States are also given accord to determine the ways in which students may transfer, may apply, and may enroll within a market-based school. One supposed benefit of privatized schooling is that schools can create stable environments for the success of a school through processes that cull “out the disruptive students,” refusals of “special education services,” and creations of “application process[es] so complex that only

involved parents would undergo the process” (Bancroft, 2009, p. 275). As there are continual indications that students who are harder to educate need more resources and funding, schools when given the option seek “less costly consumers” who will strengthen the market position of the school and be more cost-effective to educate (Lubienski, 2006, p. 337). States seek to counteract this by developing admissions processes and plans to ensure as much diversity as possible, yet Rapp and Eckes (2007) suggest that there is evidence to “suggest that state statutory admissions and enrollment plans [that reduce segregation in choice settings] may not be being enforced” (p. 15).

The results of school choice policies indicate “that any benefits of expanding choice may well come at the expense of other policy goals such as more racially integrated schools and the reduction of the Black-white achievement gaps” (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007, p. 54). Buras and Apple (2005) assert that whenever nations implement school choice policies, results often include increased levels of racial and economic segregation, increased enrollment in private schools, and the cutting of resources and funds available to public schools. Rapp and Eckes (2007) find that charter schools are more segregated. School choice “clearly increases racial segregation” and charter schools also “have had larger negative effects on the achievement of Black students” (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007, p. 53). Buras (2011) suggests that school choice reforms dispossess minorities and exacerbates inequity (p. 296).

### **Efforts to Define Teacher Education and Quality**

A Nation at Risk asserts that teaching will never be “an honored profession” until there are “differentiated salaries and some way to recognize outstanding performance” (Goldberg, 1984, p. 15). The “highly qualified teacher provision” in No Child Left

Behind evolved from A Nation at Risk which cited intellectual deficits of teachers as a main reason for the failures of schools and the American school system (Eppley, 2009, p. 5). Teacher quality in an accountability framework is determined through school productivity and performance, ignoring day to day interactions and focusing on “assembly line” manufactured outputs (Gerardi, 1984, p. 219). Teachers, through the aspect of “teacher quality” espoused through current policies are charged with developing “competent workers who can contribute to global economic competition.” Teachers are in essence “responsible for the well-being of the economy” (Saltman, 2007, p. 150). However, the evaluation and measurement procedures used to define “teacher quality” often supersede and overwhelm the effectiveness of teachers in operating with individual students (Apple, 2007, p. 113). Eppley (2009) suggests that defining “teacher quality is neither advisable nor possible” (p. 9). Teacher quality will always be “determined by an external standard of proficiency” and cannot take into context individual communities or classrooms (Eppley, 2009, p. 3)

### **Efforts on Emphasizing Academic Excellence**

#### **Before 1980**

During the 1960s and 1970s education and public schools were not national issues that garnered major attention in elections or policy making. Many people, during that time, viewed “public schools as doing a good job and the major debates [concerning education] centered on equity, integration, and social issues rather than concerns about academic performance” (McGuinn, 2006, p. 215). The most intrusive legislation on schools during that time was in the form of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which “required outcome measures, based on previously established student

performance goals,” for schools which received federal funding through developed programs (Hansen, 1993). Throughout that time frame, federal government “employed a hands-off approach to what actually went on in schools and classrooms,” but “with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the federal role began to change” (Superfine, 2005, p. 14).

### **Academic excellence sparked by *A Nation at Risk* and Ronald Reagan**

*A Nation at Risk* began the movement towards achievement through discussions it raised concerning tests, schools, and students. *A Nation at Risk* used a narrow framing to suggest that public schools were failing (Hollingworth, 2009) and promoted the notion that schools promoted “a soft, standardless curriculum that permits illiterates to receive high school diplomas and that emphasizes the socialization of youth, neglecting academic achievement” (Gerardi, 1984, p. 215). In praising *A Nation at Risk* and the ideas that came from the document, Goldberg (1984) lays bare the idea that equal access in education promotes “mediocre education” (p. 16). Orfield (1999) asserts that *A Nation at Risk* inaccurately concluded that “academic achievement had deteriorated” within the United States. A commitment to achievement on tests was held to be the correction to the deterioration (p. 583). Hollingworth (2009) notes that *A Nation at Risk* “reinforced in the public’s mind that individual achievement test scores could be used as evidence of the effectiveness of a nation’s educational system” (p. 317). Superfine (2005) states that “*A Nation at Risk* itself emphasized the need for a core curriculum” measured through achievement tests in order to ensure quality education and academic excellence (p. 14).

*A Nation at Risk*, according to Albrecht (1984) allowed educators and the general public to believe that students who dropped out of school were “unwilling or unable to

meet the new and rigorous standards demanded by society” (p. 685). Schools and society were “absolved” because the failure occurred at an individual level. Through *A Nation at Risk*, assumptions began to arise that alleged what is “good for the college-bound [student] must be good for all, and that means more science, more math, more computers - for everyone” (Albrecht, 1984, p. 685).

### **Moving academic excellence and achievement measures forward**

The presidency of George H.W. Bush helped to continue the thought of educational achievement as the outcome by which schools were measured. Sewall (1991) suggests that a main premise of *America 2000* was to monitor “higher standards of academic learning...through achievement tests” (p. 209). President Bush in *America 2000* called for “the development of assessments to measure student performance and achievement” (Superfine, 2005, p. 15). A collection of policy-makers and political leaders developed goals that defined academic excellence and sought to measure the progress towards achieving those goals through testing programs that failed “to authentically measure student achievement of meaningful knowledge and skills” (Hansen, 1993). *America 2000* tied educational achievement to performance incentives through funding and awards (Bush, 1991).

### **Achieving salience under President Clinton**

The implementation of standards and achieving those standards was not fully initiated until President Clinton decided to use standards-based reform as the “national education strategy” (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 173). *Goals 2000*’s “purpose was to help states raise academic expectations and improve academic achievement for all students” (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 181). It mandated that “states were the locus of

standards and assessment” while national standards only served as examples that should guide states in developing their own standards (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 180). If states committed to developing standards, under Goals 2000, they were allowed more flexibility and less regulation in how they used federal funding (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000). Clinton’s proposals helped to solidify the idea that the federal government’s role in education was in developing standards and “coordinating and supporting state testing” (Hess & McGuinn, 2002, p. 87). Clinton helped to perpetuate the emphasis on academic excellence by strengthening methods of monitoring “student academic performance through the imposition of standards and accountability measures” (McGuinn, 2006, p. 217).

### **No Child Left Behind continuing policies**

No Child Left Behind and George W. Bush continued the practices and policies initiated under Goals 2000 and Bill Clinton. No Child Left Behind was the adaptation of “policies that required levels and kinds of educational gains for every group of students within every school that had never been achieved anywhere” (Sunderland & Orfield, 2006, p. 551). According to Mahiri (2005) “the US government has decided that high-stakes testing will be the vehicle for accountability to ensure that no child is left behind” (p. 87). Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind up to 2008 each state had spent at least \$1.9 billion dollars with some states spending as much as \$5.3 billion on standardized tests geared towards academic excellence (Hollingworth, 2009).

### **Outcomes of achievement based education**

Academic standards create and maintain the use of standardized tests, which in turn create achievement-based criterion (Parkison, 2009, p. 50). Focusing on academic

excellence in public schools places value upon measureable objectives and observable outcomes (Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2005). Current educational policies hold “that attaching incentives (either positive or negative) to standardized achievement tests will improve student performance” (Supovitz, 2009, p. 213). Dantley (2002) asserts that the doling out of sanctions and rewards also reifies the dominance of academic excellence and the achievement-based criterion that follows with it. Orfield (1999) asserts that anytime testing is used to measure performance “the advantages of family background” are reinforced based on the “very strong relationship connecting income, parents’ education and test scores (p. 588). The gains in closing racial achievement gaps and increasing graduation rates of minorities that was evident during 1960s and 1970s are not prevalent during this period of educational reform (Orfield, 1999, p. 584).

Standards-driven curriculum on the basis of promoting academic excellence determines educational success or educational failure (Parkison, 2009). Achievement based educational models define testing well as winning, and superordinate “understanding and mastery” (Luker et al., 2001, p. 989). Educational achievement policies are built upon “structural competition” according to Luker et al. (2008, p. 988). Structural competition eliminates mutual goals, and requires failures of others to make one a success. Structural competition is defined as necessary in current educational policies for three reasons. First, there is a view that it is simple human instinct to compete and to win. Second, structural competition is seen to build character. Lastly, without the threat of failure, people would not strive to do their best (Luker et al., 2001, p. 988). Using achievement based tests as a way to measure the success of a school wrongly points to some schools as failing or successful. The research of Downey et al. (2008)

suggest that “less than half” the schools labeled failing using achievement based tests” also fail when measured by scoring “criteria that are based on learning or impact.” At the same time, their research also found that twenty percent “of schools with satisfactory achievement scores turn up among the poorest performers with respect to learning or impact” (p. 243). Parkison (2009) asserts that “individuals and groups that perform well on the standardized tests and possess the currency of high test scores gain power within the political dialogue that produces academic standards” (p. 52). For Parkison (2009) “power comes from producing high test scores” (p. 52)

Policies and systems which serve to commit public education to academic excellence may be harming public education by avoiding larger structural concerns and by being inaccurate measures of quality schools (Hursh, 2007a). Concerning policy, Dantley (2002) finds that the current policies concerning federal education, and the way they hand out punishments or rewards based on merit, hold teachers and administrators accountable, not for student learning, but for the “transmission of the systemic cultural thought” currently found in educational policy and across society (p. 340). While many policies assume that accountability requirements through testing will “lead to improvements in education,” research “on effects of accountability yielded sparse evidence that it had produced measurable or observable improvements in educational outcomes” (Hansen, 1993).

According to Supovitz (2009) current education policy has a “misguided view of our testing systems as the solution to our educational problems” (p. 223). The testing and accountability systems that are guided by achievement measures “may do as much to undermine school quality as they do to promote it” (Downey et al., 2008, p. 260). The

type of assessment used in testing standards plays a “small part in performance,” yet the more inequitable discrepancies have “more to do with deeply rooted social inequities than biases in the tests themselves” (Supovitz, 2009, p. 217). The use of high-stakes testing is seen by Supovitz (2009) as a way to symbolize education, and cannot foster “real improvements” (p. 222). High-stakes testing and achievement criterion also do not meet the standards of being reliable indicators of school quality or educational performance (Garn, 2001, p. 594).

## **Alienation of Schools from Public Sphere**

### **The shaping of alienation**

While The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided the opportunity for more equity and social justice inside of education, it also helped to create the foundations on which schools would become alienated from their communities (Davies, 2008). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 allowed the direct flow of federal money to local schools (Osborne, 1965). After the introduction of federal spending into education through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, conditions began to be attached to what schools had to comply with in order to receive funding (Davies, 2008). In the years after the Act was implemented, conservative politicians started courting voters by criticizing public education policies and the mediocrity of results (Hess & McGuinn, 2002). These criticisms eventually turned into calls for the United States to be getting more of a return on the investment they were putting into education (Hollingworth, 2009). In order to monitor the investment, state and national accountability measures would be proselytized as necessary, and the control that the communities had of schools would ultimately be lost (Davies, 2008).

The ability of politicians to attack education as ineffective and not providing enough return for its services was magnified by *A Nation at Risk*. Hunt and Staton (1996) suggest that *A Nation at Risk* was used by politicians as political fodder to capitalize upon and helped to alienate schools from their places in the local community. In the 1980s, attacks on public education were centered on expenses and effectiveness. With the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the public was led to believe that the “decline of public education” was directly impacting “the nation’s economic competitiveness” and position in the world (McGuinn, 2006, p. 215). Walden (1992) suggests that *A Nation at Risk* alienated schools by overloading upon the public “critical comments and mandates solutions” which “created a mental dissonance, confusing us as to the real national purposes of education” (p. 216).

By the 1990s “education emerged as an issue in national education” and further reified the need for national standardization at the hindrance of local control (Hess & McGuinn, 2002, p. 73). Using the basis that schools were underperforming, President George H.W. Bush and President Bill Clinton sought to increase federal control of education through the development of *America 2000* and *Goals 2000*. Through his efforts, President Bush continued the groundwork for turning local public schools into national federally controlled entities by using state governors and national policy makers to determine educational goals (Hess & McGuinn, 2000). The effort to let educational goals be determined by governors and higher-level policymakers, propelled education into state and federal politics (Sewall, 1991). And in doing so, it solidified the notion that “the national government ha[d] a major responsibility to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education,” one that was built upon standardized goals and

academic excellence (Sewall, 1991, p. 204). Clinton, with the Goals 2000 legislation, used accountability to push federal involvement into state and local education decisions (Superfine, 2005). Goals 2000 also moved forward the notion that states should lose control over the standards and policies that had been under their jurisdiction for decades which furthered the alienation of schools from their local communities (Superfine, 2005).

While A Nation at Risk helped to solidify that American education was mediocre and America 2000 and Goals 2000 established the need of federal involvement and nationally controlled standards, No Child Left Behind served to shame schools in the eyes of the public (Apple, 2007). No Child Left Behind has operated as a mechanism for producing shame upon public schools and has further led to the “loss of local control” for certain schools (Apple, 2007, p. 110). Through closing public schools that failed to meet ‘performance measures,’ No Child Left Behind lessened the attachment between community and school as schools were no longer permanent and could be closed on a yearly basis (Superfine, 2005).

### **The impact economic standardization has on alienating schools**

Schools have been alienated through educational policy by suggesting that education is an economic enterprise. Questions concerning the effectiveness of education have been centered on economic standards and not on the ethical determinants that should guide any “moral enterprise” (Gerardi, 1984, p. 216). With the emphasis of schools being in service of the economy, schools have been alienated from local communities by turning them into products of economic factors and the needs of political leaders (Garda, 2011). Under the current political and economic pressures, schools are abandoning their “role as democratic public spheres” and are becoming “spaces of

containment and control” within the communities they are supposed to serve (Giroux, 2001, p. 90). The need for efficiency in producing outcomes alienates schools from communities through the impressions that top down business oriented management styles are necessary in order to attain goals (Walden, 1992). This leads to recommendations being made to educators without their consent and ability to be involved in making the decisions that will impact their schools (Albrecht, 1984).

### **The impact academic excellence has on alienating schools**

The emphasis on academic excellence and achievement-based schooling normalizes surveillance and the aspect of failure within schools. Accountability makes conversations and debates concerning supposedly failing schools “routine” in public and political circles (Lipman, 2006, p. 56). The success of failure of schools, and their need to be held accountable to the public, is based on the annual release of findings based on achievement measures (Sunderland & Orfield, 2006). These determinations of success and failure are based on achievement measures which do not accurately depict the effectiveness of schools (Downey et al., 2008, p. 259). The standardized achievement measures are based on tests which according to Parkison (2009) reduce the hard work that comes with learning “to a numerical expression that does not resemble in any way the [learning] process that produced it” (p. 53). The standardized tests also work to narrow the curriculum available to students which undermines “the autonomy and creativity of teachers,” the local aspects and traditions of communities, and distances student-teacher relationships and school-community relationships (Crocco & Costigan, 2007, p. 530).

Policies of “aggressive blame and shame” have alienated schools from the public and from the communities that the schools serve (Apple, 2007, p. 110). Schools have been alienated through standardized test scores which are “used as weapons” that could accurately measure achievement and academic excellence (Gerardi, 1984, p. 219). The media, through the dissemination of standardized tests scores, embrace the idea that the quality of education in terms of academic excellence is poor (Albrecht, 1984). The continuance of such assertions of mediocre performance leads to the idea that education is in a state of crisis throughout the nation (Hunt & Staton, 1996). And as the public takes all of this in and receives data of achievement tests, “teachers, teachers’ unions and local administrators” are angrily blamed for the failure of public schools - especially in the areas of high-poverty and high-minority schools (Orfield, 1999, p. 587). As mentioned earlier though, the structural inequities that continue and are avoided through a narrow focus on academic excellence are allowed to persist and may strengthen with “a fracturing of the public commitment to public schools” (Maxcy, 2006, p. 279).

### **Narrowing of Purpose of Education**

#### **Thirty years of narrowing the purpose of education**

Through the past thirty years, educational policy has been focused on narrowing the curriculum. It started with A Nation at Risk which influenced the public’s thoughts and concerns about education (Albrecht, 1984). While A Nation at Risk asserted throughout the document that it was built on the “building of intellectual, moral, and spiritual strength” the recommendations proposed by the document instead focused on national economic strength (Hunt & Staton, 1996, p. 289). The Commission responsible for the creation of the report called into question that some courses that were being taught

prior to the release of *A Nation at Risk* were unnecessary and inefficient in reaching the economic goals of the nation (Goldberg, 1984). The Commission also found that the entirety of the school day should be efficient for the learning that they needed (Goldberg, 1984). With the dissemination of the report and the subsequent campaigning of politicians in favor of the reforms within the report, the public was provided with “all you need to know about education” (Albrecht, 1984, p. 684).

America 2000 and Goals 2000 continued the narrow constraints of what should be taught and learned inside of classrooms. America 2000 determined national standards and goals that were geared towards mathematics, science, and reading and sought to standardize the national curriculum so that any school, public or private can operate the curriculum and be held accountable to the market (Eisner, 1992). At the beginnings of the 1990s educational policy sought to continuously align and shape standards into “a single set” to help make schools more efficient and make American public education “tidier” (Eisner, 1992, p. 723). By President Clinton’s time in office, education policy espoused consistently narrowed the dialogue concerning education that happens within “the public sphere” (Hunt & Staton, 1996, p. 271). Clinchy (1995) notes that the language used in Goals 2000 focus on students attaining “high levels of competency in subject matter,” and have nothing to do with cultivating, passion, love, interest, or enjoyment in the pursuit of knowledge (p. 384).

By the time of *No Child Left Behind*, the narrowing of education was commonplace. With the implementation of *No Child Left Behind*, “seventy one percent of schools had reduced instructional time in one or more subjects to increase the time spent on reading and math” as those are what is valued through standardized testing

(Hollingworth, 2009, p. 322). Canfield-Davis et al. (2009) believe that No Child Left Behind makes teachers and administrators focus on test scores and the subjects assessed rather than the individual needs of the student. Hollingworth (2009) points to the focus of current federal education policy on student testing which consistently narrows the focus of education.

### **How academic excellence narrows education**

The narrow focus of schools in the name of achieving excellence in a few core subject areas of testing has adverse impacts on students. Clinchy (1995) notes that with educational policy focusing on “holding students to standards” there is more emphasis on what students should do and less emphasis placed on student freedom in learning (p. 384). Viewing success based on meeting or surpassing a certain standardized achievement score on a test also allows a “narrow view of what constitutes a quality learning experience” for each individual student (Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2005, p. 36). Supovitz (2009) posits that achievement tests “produce shallower, not deeper, instructional experiences for students” (p. 223). The subjection of schools and students to achievement scores stops schools from operating “as spaces for human development and intellectual, ethical, and political engagement” (Lipman, 2006, p. 59). Hursh (2007a) asserts that “the pressure to raise test scores” in order to meet achievement criterion compels teachers “to teach the skills and knowledge that will be tested, neglecting more complex aspects of the subject, and, indeed some subjects altogether” (p. 506). Webb et al. (2009) assert that schools are held accountable only to achievement scores on testing and the production of “stratified student identities” based on the achievement scores (p. 6). Standardized achievement tests narrow curricula and “detract from educational quality

and do not necessarily lead to improved test scores” (Klaf & Kwan, 2010, p. 203). Supovitz (2009) posits that the “inequities in performance revealed through broad-scale testing are real” and that “the results reveal true disparities in our education system driven by our social priorities” (p. 222).

### **How economic standards help to narrow education**

Crocco and Costigan (2007) found that “the accountability movement” has narrowed “curriculum and pedagogy, particularly in [language arts] and social studies at the middle and high school levels” (p. 529). Supovitz (2009) suggests that schools narrow curriculum and instruction to meet “state academic standards and assessments” which align with economic needs (p. 219). Efficiency in education is built upon economic “conceptions of education which resists any incursions by criteria of equity or social or individual development” (Welch, 1998, p. 171). Schools that are defined as low performing more often narrow their curricular focus to increase time spent on instruction in the tested areas of curriculum. Such “narrowing of the curriculum...produce[s] the appearance of equality” while it “actually produces a further stratification of knowledge as other subject areas are sacrificed to dominant subject areas reified by test score requirements” (Webb et al., 2009, p. 8). Hollingworth (2009) posits that “schools that are struggling to raise test scores are narrowing the curriculum and abandoning innovative interdisciplinary curricula to focus on, math reading, and science because of high-stakes testing” (p. 322).

## **Perpetuation of Stress and Punishment of Students, Teachers, Administrators, and Communities**

### **Educational policy and thought cultivating stress and punishment**

The release of *A Nation at Risk* helped move forward the idea that more should be expected of American youth in terms of their educational prowess. The recommendations by *A Nation at Risk* put more stress on students through requiring “more homework, more testing, more time, more “hard” courses required, higher grading standards [and tougher discipline]” (Albrecht, 1984, p. 685). Albrecht (1984) in response to *A Nation at Risk* found that American educational policy is now being built to chase “kids out of school” (p. 685). *A Nation at Risk* posits that the responsibility of the student is most important and that responsibility for individual learning increases as a student gets older - and this responsibility can be measured through their scores on achievement tests (Goldberg, 1984). Goldberg (1984) cites *A Nation at Risk* as placing the stress and burden of learning upon the parent and student. It is impossible for the society to be at fault for individual failure. (p. 16).

By the time *No Child Left Behind* came to fruition in 2002, there was the presumption that “the federal government may cajole, implore, entice, or threaten states and districts in order to bring them into line with its educational aims” (Sewall, 1991, p. 209). According to research by Canfield-Davis et al. (2009) administrators feel “threatened by” *No Child Left Behind* and current educational policy (p. 156). Current educational policies have shifted the federal Department of Education “from a grant-administering institution” which provides money and resources for schools to a compliance enforcer which withholds money and resources from schools (McGuinn,

2006, p. 219). Sunderland and Orfield (2006) assert that No Child Left Behind and other educational policies are attached with “very strong sanctions and embarrassing publicity about educational failure for not reaching goals” (p. 551). Schools in lower income areas experience “fewer financial resources” and “more limited academic programs” as a result of educational policies - a direct contradiction of the original intent of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Hollingworth, 2009, p. 323). All of these outcomes of No Child Left Behind serve the purpose outlined by Sewall (1991) of imploring and threatening districts so the federal government can meet its educational goals.

### **The use of accountability as punishment**

The threats and punishments made through current educational policy are based on achievement measures and the belief in academic excellence. Educational policies in the era of achievement have “moved to the very top of the domestic political agenda” (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 174). The “monitoring of performance data is accompanied with threats of school closure, school reconstitution, teacher dismissal, and penalties of reduced school income” (Webb et al., 2009, p. 8). McCarthey (2008) suggests that “the focus on testing had resulted in an increased pressure for teachers and narrowing of the curriculum and had negative effects on students” (p. 497). Shouse and Mussoline (1999) find through research that there is evidence that when disadvantaged schools restructure to implement the goals of federal educational policies they, at best, “accrue no long term achievement advantage,” and in some cases even “lag substantially behind” after the restructuring (p. 254).

Current educational policies and the practices associated with those policies of supervising and monitoring are asserted to be needed to focus on “getting [the taxpayers]

money's worth from our ailing schools" in providing economic productivity (Hollingworth, 2009, p. 317). The only way for accountability systems to work in improving performance is through providing tough sanctions or meaningful incentives (Peterson & West, 2006, p. 57). Lipman (2006) suggests that education policies create climates surrounding schools emphasized on punishment, sanctions and stress. Ng (2006) posits that accountability movements in education are thought of as "punitive" and disregarding of community needs (p. 369). Hansen (1993) suggests that "mindless compliance behavior by district and school personnel" is a flaw in accountability efforts if not solidified by strong beliefs by educators and communities that the values attached to the accountability are necessary and worthwhile.

The current emphasis of punishing schools also impacts teachers. McCarthey (2008) finds research that teachers' experience current educational policy as "repressive" (p. 500). Impacts concerning punishment and sanctions that are tied to current educational policies are more widely felt by "teachers from low-income schools" (McCarthey, 2008, p. 498). Educational policies in practice, according to Farkas and Johnson's (1993) research, have led to "division, factionalism, and political gridlock" because the policies encourage "conflict, not cooperation." Education reform correlates with high amounts of "divisions, fissures, resentments and misunderstandings" within schools (Farkas & Johnson, 1993). Eisner (1992) purports education policies in the current era "develop cynicism and passive resistance" amongst teachers (p. 723). Lipman (2006) finds that educational policies help to create a "culture of coercion" which makes educators feel pressure "to bow to the authority of policies emanating from the 'Central Office' (p. 56).

## **Perpetuation of Racial Disparity in Education**

### **Continuing racial disparity through federal education**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided an opportunity for federal public education policy to focus on empowering the disadvantaged and disenfranchised. The Act was part of a larger attempt by the federal government to create “an expanded welfare state” which could provide for the empowerment of “poor people of color” (Roediger, 2008, p. 170). McKay (1965) posited after the Elementary and Secondary Education Act came out that it marked “the assumption by the federal government of its appropriate and long-overdue role in assuring adequate educational opportunity for all American children” (p. 427). Osborne (1965) states ESEA was premised upon “the Office of Education...making every effort to establish procedures which will prove equitable” (p. 190). Among those features he pointed chiefly to the provision of federal aid to schools to assist the needs of students in poverty. Superfine (2005) also notes ESEA targeted the use of federal funding to assist “disadvantaged students” (p. 13). Orfield (1999) concurs by stating that The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 sought to quell disparity and was shaped to provide for the “inclusion of historically excluded groups in better schools” and to provide “strategies to help” those groups - including the impoverished “participate fully in education while upgrading educational offerings in low-income communities and addressing other problems related to family poverty” (p. 581).

One of the primary levers for assisting schools with funding was through Title I. Title I money, under the original authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, could be allocated “for teachers’ salaries, for school construction,

for textbooks, and for varieties of curriculum aids and equipment;” however, any item the money was used for “must be part of a special program focused on the particular educational needs of the children of poverty” (Alford, 1965, p. 484). Davies (2008) suggests that Title I as constructed under ESEA sought to quell racial disparities by distributing federal funds “to almost every school district in the country” to help provide resources to poor and minority students.” Before the last decade of the 20th Century, more specifically Goals 2000, Title I funds “provided billions of dollars per year to states for the education of at-risk students” which went primarily to impoverished schools or schools with high concentrations of minority students. However, in 1994 with legislation designed around Goals 2000, Title I was changed to only provide funds to support those “at-risk students” based on “the development of standards, assessment, and accountability systems” (Superfine, 2005, p. 11). The shift in how Title I funds were provided was the catalyst for the educational reform movement of standardization and accountability based upon achievement across states and schools and helped to perpetuate racial disparity (Superfine, 2005, p. 25).

### **Funding**

Federal funding since 1994 has gone away from the basic framework of assisting all children that are disadvantaged which has led to the perpetuation of racial disparities. Funding for education throughout the country is premised upon local neighborhoods and communities, and the property taxes therein. Sweetland (2002) posits that the racial segregation experienced through formal and informal housing policies led to the funneling of children into school districts that experienced the same racial segregation (p. 8). Rubenstein et al. (2008) find that areas populated by higher percentages of minority

students experience less distribution of resources allocated to them than schools with high percentages of white students and suggest that “the dispersion of minority students and low income students within states appear to have a strong negative impact on funding equity” (p. 21). With funding being based on the informal and formal segregation through housing structures, biased and prejudiced beliefs arose citing that segregation developed a “sense of despair and nihilism” and eroded any “sense of personal responsibility” which led to the production of “pathological behavior” across the Black community and infiltrated schools and classrooms (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 103).

### **Outcomes**

Educational policies, in contrast to the original intent of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 have shifted in favor of continuing to reproduce the status quo of inequity and “unequal access” to education (p. 205). According to Orfield (1999) the educational policies that have dominated federal legislation over the past thirty years have “emphasized more tests, more course requirements and the introduction of market mechanisms” and have failed to make the same “major progress” in quelling racial disparities within education prior to the current ascent of achievement focused policies (p. 585). According to Hollingworth (2009), educational policies are ineffective due in part to their commitment to colorblindness which allows all policies to be placed on principles of individual merit and “asserts that social class is the most serious obstacle to mobility” (p. 312). Alemán (2007) cites the federal policies concerning funding being based consistently on property rights as perpetuating inequality by disadvantaging, discriminating, and oppressing “communities and students of color.” (p. 548). This is troublesome as Harris and Herrington (2006) note that even the best intended reform in

the current era of federal education policy “may not be enough to offset other forces on students and schools” such as race and class” (p. 128). Instead the policies concerning education have not been as “effective in terms of extending access and reducing gaps in academic achievement within society” as the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and its cohorts were (Orfield, 1999, p. 580).

### **Teacher quality and racial disparities**

The focus on teacher quality and how that is defined within current education policy also has consequences that exacerbate racial disparities. According to Ng (2006) the consequences of educational policy may perpetuate racial disparity by exacerbating the “existing problem of teacher shortages in urban schools” (p. 370). Harris and Herrington (2006) suggest that if students that are white are more likely to be successful and if teachers that are successful are more likely to have classrooms of white students, “then the schools attended by white students will be more attractive to teachers” (p. 224).

### **Academic excellence and racial disparities**

Orfield (1999) found that after The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 “there was a particularly sharp upward trend in high school graduation for Black students and for Black enrollment in college, particularly in states that had traditionally excluded Black students” (p. 584). Through the values of equity and access that were cornerstones for ESEA continually being questioned and criticized, a defining argument was made in *A Nation at Risk* that equity and access should not hinder the achievement of schools and individuals (Goldberg, 1984). Hunt and Staton (1996) suggest that *A Nation at Risk* was the catalyst for making achievement “more important than social equity” (p. 285). The commitment to achievement and academic excellence over equity

and access to education continued racial disparities at both the individual and institutional level.

At the individual level, the use of standardized tests based on achievement measures is innately discriminatory. Borg et al. (2007) find that testing for achievement “might result in worsening the gap between the schooling outcomes of Black and Hispanic students and their white counterparts” (p. 714). Downey et al. (2008) claim that “achievement scores have more to do with family influences than with the quality of schools” and therefore defining schools as failures based on student achievement is a fallacy (p. 243). Harris and Herrington (2006) find that while average achievement test scores rose throughout educational reform movement, the “achievement gap” between white students and their Black counterparts also increased (p. 225). Students of color or students that are impoverished will “be less competitive” when using standardized tests based on achievement, (Borg et al., 2007, p. 714). Through construction of policies based on standardized achievement tests, Borg et al. (2007) claim that increasing or improving education is not a certainty.

At the institutional level, racial disparity is continued through school-level accountability methods that are based on achievement criteria. Miller et al. (2008) suggest that research indicates that achievement measure accountability efforts serve to disproportionately sanction schools populated by a high percentage of minority students, which helps to define the inequity currently occurring in educational policy. When measures are taken into context and based on learning or impact, schools with a majority of African Americans “tend to do somewhat better than non-African American schools” (Miller et al., 2008, p. 113). Orfield et al. (2002) posit that accountability based on

achievement measures makes unequal schools “responsible for achieving equal results” (p. 50).

### **School choice and racial disparities**

Orfield et al. (2002) posit that through educational policies of school choice racial disparity is perpetuated. Harris and Herrington (2006) find minimal evidence that choice and privatization through market schemes “improves the equity of outcomes” (p. 223). Stoddard and Corcoran (2007) find “that there may be a common demand for charter schools that results in greater segregation by race” (p. 42). They also suggest that school choice within a community is enhanced with chronically low achievement scores and in areas where there is more diversity (p. 48). Buras (2011) finds that choice perpetuates racial disparities through “formal exclusion from selective admissions,” but also through “informal exclusion” such as “targeted student recruitment, laborious application procedures and deadlines, enrollment caps, parental steering and harassment, ‘pushing out,’ and periodic dumping from presumably open access charter schools” (p. 323).

## **Neoliberalism and Race**

### **Definition of Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism is a return to free-market principles. The same free market principles which are associated with economic collapses in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Melamed, 2006; Tabb, 2003). According to Klees (2008) neoliberalism “is the inheritor of conservative and public choice economics policies” (p. 312). Like these policies, neoliberalism calls for “cutting back government budgets, privatization of government operations, ending of tariffs and other forms of protection, facilitating

movement of foreign capital, emphasizing exports, charging user fees for many public services, and lowering worker protection through flexible labor markets” (Klees, 2008, p. 312). Neoliberalism advocates narrowing the scope, responsibility, and size of government. With a society embracing an economic and political model of neoliberal policies, the free market works as a “self-regulating mechanism” and becomes “the most efficient and most moral form of social and economic organization. Neoliberal proponents suggest, at the same time, that any collectivist policy or policy for the social welfare of citizens “stifles efficiency and stymies individual liberty” (Cahill, 2009, p. 12). With a government adhering to Neoliberal practices, it helps to maintain the belief that a “construction of a less regulated, more profit-oriented market regime” allows for more freedom for individuals, more growth for corporations, and more security for the nation (Stanfield & Carroll, 2009, p. 4). According to Pieterse (2004), “neoliberalism is about business, financial operations, and marketing.” Hence, every policy and piece of governance is operated through the lens of business and efficiency (p. 123). It is in this manner that neoliberalism allows the market to “expand its reach to include all aspects of social life” (Giroux, 2005, p. 13).

To assure that neoliberalism remains hegemonic; a language has developed that allows neoliberal practices to envelop alternatives. As stated earlier, neoliberalism relies on everything to become oriented to business principles. This includes verbiage. Allusions to “the market place,” “quality,” “competitive,” “service provider,” “market visibility,” and “benchmark indicators” all correspond with the Neoliberal worldview. No matter the service or good provided, neoliberalism seeks to assimilate the verbiage of business into the verbiage of any public service or good (Holborow, 2007, p. 60). Giroux

(2005) states that these words, references, and allusions, help “neoliberal policies hide” by making it seem as if the ideas put forth are “common sense” and are “immutable laws of nature” (p. 10). Neoliberalism alters “freedom” and uses it as a synonym for “the American way of life,” “American values,” and “the freedom to accumulate and consume without restraint” (Pieterse, 2004, p. 120). Neoliberalism also warps the term democracy according to Giroux (2005). He states that “democracy becomes synonymous with free markets, while issues of equality, racial justice, and freedom are stripped of any substantive meaning” (p. 9). Part of the reason for this emphasis on creating a new vocabulary is to present neoliberalism in “simple terms.” Such presentations allow for neoliberalism to present itself in “a straight line from the individual consumer to the overall workings of the economy, both stretching towards an endless horizon of ever-greater consumerism” reliant upon service to the free-market (Holborow, 2007, p. 65).

Neoliberalism has gained strength and become hegemonic within American government. Tabb (2003) asserts that “Neoliberal policies have been voluntarily embraced by elected officials in U.S. society” (p. 39). Such an embrace has caused “state commitment and function to shift” (Tabb, 2003, p. 39). With neoliberal policies rooted in politics and business, the United States government has “shifted from its caretaking commitments to ordering and securing the flows of capital, goods, services, and increasingly information” (Goldberg, 2008, p. 1713). The power of the political elite in the Neoliberal government of the United States also coerced many other countries - many of which with emerging economies - to adopt similar neoliberal policies emphasizing privatization, deregulation, and individualism (Stanfield & Carroll, 2009, p. 5).

Neoliberalism seems to manifest itself in society through citizens acting more negatively and harshly towards one another. Neoliberalism does this by marginalizing societal bonds and allowing individualism and competition to supersede democracy (Tabb, 2003, p. 35). The endorsement of Neoliberal values by business and political elite helps Americans to believe that there is “ample opportunity for economic security and advancement to those willing to work hard” and also that impoverished people are in poverty because they individually lack merit or effort that ensures success (Federico, 2006, p. 600). Neoliberalism, as Goldberg (2008) states, can also cause a government to become complicit in discrimination, humiliation, exclusion, and belittlement. This occurs as the state is curtailed from acting on most forms of preferences by corporations or individuals. In a neoliberal government, racial prejudice, discrimination, and bias can occur freely without a government able to protect its citizens from such behavior (Goldberg, 2008).

### **Neoliberalism in Thought and Practice**

Neoliberalism in philosophy and practice ascended at a lightning pace over the last three decades of the 20th Century. From the Great Depression until the end of the 1970s, many countries adhered to tenets of liberal democracy which was “concerned in principle at least to advance the welfare of its citizens” (Goldberg, 2008, p. 1712). These advancements included development and “expansions of social security, welfare programs, various forms of national health care, and public education” (Goldberg, 2008, p. 1712). Starting in the 1940s, neoliberal ideas emerged from a desire to return to “classical nineteenth century ideals of laissez-faire entrepreneurialism.” A philosopher, Friedrich von Hayek, led this emergent trend on the claim that individualism and

spontaneous action, rather than a planned society, was the true underpinnings of social and economic progress. While the liberal democratic methods of advancing the welfare of citizens held true into the 1970s, the economic crisis of the Seventies helped Hayek's philosophies gain traction - especially in London, Washington DC, and the University of Chicago (Holborow, 2007, p. 58). The growth of neoliberal ideals in the face of the economic crisis of the 1970s provided an alternative political model that quickly captured the imaginations of the political and corporate sector alike to expand capitalist enterprises and markets (Goldberg, 2008, p. 1712).

The elections of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States brought neoliberalism from political thought into executive practice. These practices led to "sweeping changes in national and international rhetoric and policy" (Klees, 2008, p. 311). By the time that Thatcher and Reagan became ensconced as world leaders, their political and economic philosophies of neoliberalism were adopted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Beginning in the early 1980s, the World Bank changed its belief that countries should invest in health, education, and various social services and instead eschewed the idea that social services were no longer wise to invest in because of poor management (Klees, 2008, p. 337). Since that time the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have continued to use their power in guiding and supporting national economic development to ensure that neoliberal orthodoxy would become "the norm" for each country's economy. In order to have debts rescheduled, loans upheld, or new loans submitted countries would have to implement neoliberal practices in their governments - including a deflation in the social services they provided. As neoliberalism shaped the world, privatization programs "converted state

services into private assets,” creating more capitalist enterprises and weakening the concern for citizens and social welfare programs (Holborow, 2007, p. 58). By the 1990s, as Pieterse (2004) asserts, neoliberal globalization had achieved an unrelenting grip as the economic regime of the world.

Neoliberalism has a profound effect on citizens operating within the Neoliberal society. When Neoliberal theory is put into practice, as has been the case since the early 1980s, the supposed freedom that a Neoliberal economy provides is granted and maintained “only for a small minority of the population, and only by an activist state that restrains and suppresses the rights and freedoms of labour as a class” (Cahill, 2009, p. 14). For much of the citizenry, neoliberalism has not provided freedom, but has expanded the power of the elite class, weakened the power of the laboring classes, and while doing so has submitted those classes to the few powerful elite (Cahill, 2009, p. 14). Under a Neoliberal regime, the protestations of most citizens, especially the least affluent and connected, are not considered, or when considered, are not taken seriously as they are “outside of the current legitimated policy frameworks” (Monkman & Baird, 2002, p. 502). With no voice in constructing or modifying policy, weakened power as part of a laboring class, and with a government providing minimal if any welfare, most citizens are left weak and disenfranchised (Monkman & Baird, 2002). The citizens that need the most help are the ones that suffer the most through the economic and political policies of neoliberalism (Vieux & Petras, 1992, p. 27).

Under the liberal democratic influence, many countries established and strengthened the social contract between citizens and governments to expand “social provisions” that could provide “both a safety net and a set of conditions upon which

democracy could be experienced” and also garner more engagement of citizens in the development of policies (Giroux, 2005, p. 4). As Roberts and Mahtani (2010) contend, that social contract has changed, and so has the relationship between citizens and government. Through Neoliberal policies, the capitalist class has developed an exclusive contract with the government which allows capital to “minimize the taxes it pays everywhere,” “cut public services to finance tax cuts to the rich, and demand privatization.” This contract between the capitalist class and the Neoliberal government cuts the salaries and benefits of laborers, and reduces social services that benefit the public good (Tabb, 2003, p. 34). Neoliberal policies fail “the practical test of reality in implementation” as they do much to harm the public good (Sweetland, 2002, p. 8). Evidence shows that in country after country income gaps between rich and poor, under Neoliberal policies, widen and social services are cut by at least fifty percent if not more (Vieux & Petras, 1992). The neoliberal policies enacted in favor of a free market have emptied “unions and factories of their working members” and have “presided over the reversal of many major gains achieved” during the middle parts of the 20th Century (Vieux & Petras, 1992, p. 27). As neoliberalism continues, it unabashedly continues to fail in providing “freedom, prosperity, and social justice” (Vieux & Petras, 1992, p. 26) and promotes “economic inequality, iniquitous power relations, and rigid exclusions from citizenship and civic participation” (Giroux, 2005, p. 14).

### **The Role of the Market**

In a Neoliberal society, the market becomes the fulcrum for stability and progress. Neoliberal proponents assert that “opening markets to the free flow of capital and goods will bring growth, prosperity, and freedom” (Vieux & Petras, 1992, p. 25). Giroux and

Giroux (2006) recognize that in a Neoliberal society “the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions” (p. 22). Neoliberalism shifts the idea of protection from governments responsible for protecting citizens to governments responsible for protecting the ability of capital to continue to accumulate profits. This new protection has left citizens to bear the brunt of “violent fluctuations in the market” (Cahill, 2009, p. 14).

With the market being the stable force for progress and security, it achieves an untouchable status within society - leaving little to no alternatives to thinking outside of the Neoliberal paradigm. Neoliberalism relies on the market and the “discipline of the market” as it will always provide the best possible outcome. In this view, critical democracy, regulations, and alternatives to a completely laissez-faire outcome are unheard and disregarded (Hursh, 2007a). Neoliberalism and the policies of free market fundamentalism have provided countries, states, communities, and individuals with little choice but to adhere to Neoliberal ideals (Pieterse, 2004). The free market, built on the idea of complete freedom is actually its own discursive collar. As policies are put in place, documents, meetings, and languages revolve around the market or corollaries to a marketplace. There is no alternative metaphor, and there is no alternative view, but that of a market (Holborow, 2007).

One of the key features of neoliberalism and its worshipping of the free-market is the competition the market creates in every avenue of society. Neoliberalism at its fundamental core “relies on the values of choice and competition” and often, if not all the time, ensures those values are held even if it means inequity and a worse future, in order to accomplish the goals of neoliberalism (Webb et al., 2009, p. 4). Economic competition

has failed to provide equality and has exacerbated inequalities. Competition is not an equalizer, instead it enables the capitalist class to “prey upon and benefit from those who have been disenfranchised” (Webb et al., 2009, p. 4). Competition, in a Neoliberal society, is “synonymous with efficiency, cost-effectiveness and ‘best practice’” and has nothing to do with terms of social justice or welfare (Holborow, 2007, p. 51). In the case of the United States and its adherence to Neoliberal beliefs, competition is “oppressive and dehumanizing when the game is rigged” (Webb et al., 2009, p. 4).

One indicator that competition is ‘rigged’ and has exacerbated inequalities is in the maintaining of an elite class within American society. Neoliberalism, despite its assurances of the market allowing wealth and power to be generated more equitably, works to strengthen the elite class by cutting the taxes they pay to the nation, insulating them from pressure from the rest of the citizenry, and allowing them the power to make political and governmental decisions free of a true democratic process (Hahnel, 2009). At the same time, current free-market policies and practices have “disenfranchised ever larger segments of the world body politic” (Hahnel, 2009, p. 1018). While the elite class harkens to the goodness of the free-market and the chance for freedom and prosperity it brings, they also rig the system to continue to maintain a “lucrative advantage” over other classes (Stanfield & Carroll, 2009, p. 12). The elite class has special privileges and products left reserved for it in the Neoliberal free-market society (Sweetland, 2002, p. 10). With that being the case, any supposed commitment to the moral and just market is blatantly false.

## **Meritocracy**

Current neoliberal policies maintain a meritocratic system. Yet it is a meritocratic system “in which individuals must compete on a structurally unequal basis” (Tabb, 2003, p. 36). Dantley (2002) defines a meritocracy as “a clearly defined system of rewards and sanctions.” He further assesses that the rewards and sanctions help to “reify the positivist position and ensure its continual influence.” These rewards and sanctions, and the sustainment of the positivist position, are built on traits and attributes that have been established by the dominant and hegemonic class. Often then, the rewards are given to anyone who assimilates and acquiesces to the norms of the status quo; while punishments are handed down to those who fail to integrate into the dominant hegemonic traits and attributes (p. 341). Neoliberal policies also ensure that people are defined in the current meritocracy by the amount of money they have or do not have. People with money or those that are making money are afforded rewards that help gain their ascension into the privileged class. People without money or that lose money, are not afforded the same privileges, and are left to their own devices for survival (Stanfield & Carroll, 2009, p. 8). The current meritocracy under neoliberalism also “requires social conditioning and social legitimation that tends to undermine the social cohesion necessary for orderly social cooperation” within any society (Stanfield & Carroll, 2009, p. 9). Thus meritocracy has helped to dissolve a feeling of social community built on “kinship and polity” and has strengthened divisive economic relationships built on individual success and competition (Stanfield & Carroll, 2009, p. 9). While the privileged are rewarded, the poor are told to take care of themselves and “to take action about their condition” (Penn, 2002, p. 129). As Hahnel (2009) explains, “market freedom often leads to outcomes that we know do

not reflect what most people need or want.” In the case of the American society, market freedom has led to widening gaps between rich and poor, a rigged system that benefits the elite class, and a large majority of Americans to fend for themselves with little or no help from the government (p. 1015).

### **Privatization**

According to Sleeter (2008), Neoliberal governments are concerned with enabling markets and with “replacing public services with private enterprise” (p. 1947). Under Neoliberal governments, a view occurs that casts the state as incompetent and “essentially incapable” of delivering services and goods to the public. The private sector is seen as the sole competent and capable deliverer of goods and services to the general public (Penn, 2002, p. 126). From a neoliberal perspective, “there is no alternative to privatization” (Klees, 2008, p. 319). This stems from the notion that “even if governments could deliver needed additional goods and services efficiently and equitably,” they could not be financed because of the need for severe tax cuts and tax ceilings (Klees, 2008, p. 319). Privatization, while privatizing social services, also socializes the risk of the market. The government, in a neoliberal society, is responsible for any failure or loss of revenue that corporations experience while in contracts to provide social services. The nation, in neoliberalism, must ensure that private companies make profits off of social services (Cahill, 2009, p. 13).

## **Neoliberalism in Education**

### **Neoliberalism and the use of education as an economic tool**

Global competition and international economic standards set forth by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank frame education to be in the service of developing and growing national and international economies efficiently (Monkman & Baird, 2002, p. 503; Sweetland, 2002). Bergeron (2008) states that this matter of framing the purpose of education mandates that schools “increase human capital” and “economic efficiency and growth” and in doing so, deemphasize “equitable and democratic development (p. 350). With schools being framed to boost economic development and growth “those best qualified to craft education policy” were business people. The crafting by business people allowed for curriculum in all areas of learning to be devoted to corporate principles, and for efficiency to supersede any collective or civic ideals (Bartlett et al., 2002, p. 10). Neoliberalism turned education into “a resource for global competition and private wealth accumulation” which enhanced and restored the power of the elite within society by making schools work as economic tools (Sleeter, 2008, p. 1948). One of the features of the economic control of education is through the supposed desirability of efficiency in schooling. Welch (1998) claims that “efficiency often masks a...conception of education which resists any incursions by criteria of equity or social or individual development” (171). Welch (1998) further contends that a desire to make education efficient in economic terms distorts schooling and skews it towards “economics and business management” (p. 171). All of this helps to establish regulations and controls upon schooling. Such regulations and controls, established by business

leaders, work to “normalize unequal relations of power, and serve to solidify the rule of dominant classes” (Mitchell, 2003, p. 390).

Schools working as economic tools help to ‘solidify the rule of dominant classes’ by maintaining and replicating labor relations. Leonardo (2009) suggests that schools help children learn the “dispositions necessary for the reproduction of capital” and learn their place in society: either as privileged or as unprivileged (p. 47). Lipman (2006) asserts that the coalescing of economic agendas and educational policies work to segregate and “stratify education” in order to create a “highly stratified labor force” (p. 67). The guarantee “of good jobs and better pay” that comes with education serving as an economic tool is false for many, including many minority students. Instead, in an economic structure that is inequitable, even “educational achievement brings no guarantee of economic success” (Anyon & Greene, 2007, p. 159).

### **Neoliberalism and standardized testing**

Standardized testing is the means to the end of developing competition and choice in public education within the United States. Standardized testing misdirects attention to the supposed failures of schools, teachers and students, instead of focusing attention upon the structural and systemic societal features of those failures (Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2005, p. 40). Test scores, either positive or negative, become the “currency” that influences the market. Better schools are defined through better standardized test scores. Failing schools are evident through lower test scores (Parkison, 2009). Parkison (2009) further asserts that the emphasis of test scores and standardized testing to develop and sustain an educational market further “displaces social responsibility as a guiding principle” (p. 56). Standardized testing propels the inequality that happens within a

structural competition choice-driven educational system. Parkison (2009) suggests that high test scores give the highly performing group power. It is these students and groups of students that gain the power and privilege of highly regarded schools and are able to gain power inside and out of education (p. 52). Standardized testing not only conspires to make schooling inequitable for students, it also narrows what is taught inside of schools. A continued phrase used by Neoliberal proponents of education asserts that in education, “what you value, you measure.” According to current educational policy, math, reading, and science are the only subjects measured through standardized testing. Using their own words then, the only aspects students need to learn revolve directly around math, reading, and science (Hursh, 2007a, p. 513). The narrowing of learning and what is focused and valued inside of schools, according to Rodriguez (2010), “is robbing students of their right to a well-rounded education” and “is actually aggravating the achievement gap” (p. 939). In both cases - the narrowing of learning and the use of test scores as currency - “show a largely accurate reflection of a societal ambivalence with education” (Supovitz, 2009, p. 222).

To further exacerbate the ramifications of the competitive model of education that neoliberalism promotes, standardized testing seems to be discriminatory (Luker et al., 2001, p. 994). Borg et al. (2007) found that “the social difficulties imposed by race and class differentiations in this country will virtually ensure that schools with larger percentages of poor and minority students will be more likely to have lower average student scores on standardized tests” (p. 714). The solutions to the supposed ‘achievement gap’ that perpetuates the idea that minority students are less successful in schools than their white counterparts likely occur in addressing the societal problems and

“moral imperatives of social justice and equality of opportunity” (Hollingworth, 2009; Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2005, p. 41). The current practices of competitive education and standardized testing work to “deflect attention from” matters of a socially unequal society (Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2005, p. 41). Current standardized testing practices within the United States which are focused on Annual Yearly Progress models tend “to identify schools with large African American enrollments at a much greater frequency” than the use of other measurement strategies to assess school performance. When other measures are used schools with high proportions of Black populations “tend to do somewhat better than” schools that are not majority Black (Miller et al., 2008, p. 113). When schools are “evaluated based on the percentage of students passing the standardized exams, it becomes rational to leave the lowest performing students behind” (Hursh, 2007a, p. 506). Using Adequate Yearly Progress in the manner that it is used by educational policy helps to “confirm the popular image of inner-city schools as a problem” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 164). Standardized testing may also limit the discussion of equity within schools. Achievement gaps are based on academic performance, and the solution to those gaps is seen as purely in academic ways - more instruction, more time in the classroom, more focus on the tested subjects - and is not focused on a deficiency in resources (Sleeter, 2008, p. 1952).

### **Neoliberalism and competition in education**

Neoliberalism in education policy has relied on legitimating “structural competition” as a necessary component of education. Arguments in favor of competition state that competition “is a natural human instinct and therefore simply a fact” of life which means it should be replicated in all social services, and that structural competition

will foster the impetus for schools to “strive to do their best” (Luker et al., 2001, p. 988). In this structural competition view of education, winning and becoming the best is more important than “understanding and mastery” and winning is determined through high test scores (Luker et al., 2001, p. 989). Structural competition makes low test scores synonymous with failure and “failure is made highly visible.” Such visibility increases surveillance and makes additional monitoring of low-performing schools and teachers an absolute essential (Lipman, 2006, p. 55).

Competition breeds routines of monitoring and surveillance to place blame and admonish schools and teachers. As Lipman (2006) suggests, “the annual ritual of the publication of standardized test results, state watch lists of schools scoring below state minimums, and an index of failing schools” is commonplace in every community and state throughout the nation (p. 56). With a focus on competition and test scores, success is rendered through the “attainment of the ‘complex skills’ necessary for individual success in the global economy” and not through the development of citizenship skills and multicultural awareness (Mitchell, 2003, p. 399). The promotion of competition and the identification of some schools as successful and others as failing is also handicapped by the invalid nature of explaining success and failure. Klees (2008) asserts that there is “no valid way to measure” success, failure, or how much value a school adds to student learning, which makes the promotion of successful schools as winning and the marginalizing of other schools as failures even more troublesome (p. 330).

Competitive education may also “fertilize the roots of bigotry and racial discrimination” by widening the chasms of supposed intellectual abilities and falsely documenting “the apparent intellectual inferiority of...minority children who do not

compete successfully” (Luker et al., 2001, p. 991). Klaf and Kwan (2010) found that competitive education may in fact over label and over identify urban schools as “in need of improvement” or “chronically failing” and may identify students “at risk,” but it does nothing to address the “social inequalities found in U.S. society and instead reproduces inequities through its practices” in determining successes and failures (p. 206). The schools that are most targeted by the sanctions in place as part of the competitive model of education are those schools which “are virtually all minority and poor” (Orfield, 2005, p. 1050). In the competitive model of education, fault lies solely with the school or student that is labeled as a failure. Others, including policy-makers, are therefore able to forget about the “structural reasons for school failure.” At the same time, any success is also deemed to be determined solely by the individual, and so those school districts privileged by being white or upper class are afforded the myth that they achieved success as a school and as a student solely through their own hard work (Leonardo, 2009, p. 130).

### **Neoliberalism and school choice**

Opening the service of public education to neoliberalism and the associated adherence to a free market system is ultimately harmful to society. Sweetland (2002) asserts that choice in education will narrow education into a “pursuit of profit.” This will ultimately change education from a public good that serves the whole society into a corporate entity which will serve “only those who can pay the most” and will ignore “those most costly to educate” (p. 11). International evidence points out that a market-based choice-driven educational system has “exacerbated inequality and inefficiency in the provision of schooling” (Klees, 2008, p. 313). While choice supposedly “compels schools to be responsible to communities,” Buras and Apple (2005) found evidence from

other countries implementing choice-based educational policies that suggested choice skewed educational accountability efforts; favoring the elite and marginalizing the disenfranchised (p. 556).

Choice movements, including the current promotion of charter schools, are often harmful to the education of minority populations. Charter schools, operating in the same manner as any other form of school choice, may exacerbate racial segregation in schools (Renzulli, 2005. p. 413). Renzulli (2005) found that “whites who attend schools with nonwhites continue to look for options that are even more white” and that whites consistently try to “escape the threat” of a high minority enrollment within a school “by retreating to white schooling options” (p. 412). To make this more troubling, whites do not seem to leave a school based on decisions of academic performance of that school but on the racial makeup of the environment (Renzulli, 2005, p. 414). Bifulco and Ladd (2007) found “charter schools are more racially segregated than traditional public schools in the same district” (p. 53). This seems to occur according to their research because “both Black and white charter school families tend to choose charter schools with peers who are more similar to their own children both racially and socioeconomically than in their regular public schools (p. 53). Garcia (2008) in his research concerning Arizona charter schools found that in charter schools “nearly all racial/ethnic groups (except Hispanics) attended charter schools with a higher percentage of students from the same racial/ethnic group than the district school they exited” (p. 825). Garcia (2008) also found that segregation occurs in charter schools with whites transferring to schools with more white students and minority populations choosing to isolate themselves (p. 823). Rapp and Eckes (2007) found that even when schools have the ability to recruit student

populations, they do not do so to recruit more diverse populations within a school. Instead, charter schools seem to recruit certain races to attend their school (p. 15).

Charter schools also “have had larger negative effects on the achievement of Black students...than on white students” (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007, p. 53). Bifulco and Ladd (2007) found that charter schools may increase the achievement gap based on current standardized testing and scoring practices (p. 53). Zimmer and Buddin (2007) found that charter schools could be having “a negative impact on achievement for minority students” (p. 321). Even with the possibility of stipulations and guidelines to limit the possibility of racial segregation in choice movements, those stipulations are rarely enforced (Rapp & Eckes, 2007; Renzulli, 2005, p. 413). Charter schools, as Buras (2011) found enforce formal and informal exclusionary processes for some students through selective admission, targeting certain students to recruit, intensive admission applications and deadlines, ceilings for enrollment, harassment of parents, and strict punitive measures concerning student discipline (p. 323).

### **Neoliberalism and privatization in education**

Neoliberalism in education also maintains that the best way to provide competition and choice in education is through the privatization of the educational system. Proponents of privatization assert that privatization will increase parental participation, as the expenditure for service will be more direct and concrete (Bergeron, 2008, p. 350). Lipman and Haines (2007) suggest that “the privatization of schools...eliminates democratic participation in decisions that govern public institutions paid for by public funds” which is harmful to schools, students, and parents (p. 493). In research by Mulinari and Neergaard (2010) they found that a privatization of schooling

increases class and race segregation and decreases “egalitarian and inclusive school practices” (p. 152). Supporters of privatization have been able to get around the inequitable and harmful circumstances that privatization strengthens in education by arguing that “poor people would be willing to pay more...than they currently do if they could have more access to better schooling” (Klees, 2008, p. 313).

### **Neoliberalism and Whiteness in Education**

Whiteness and institutional racism are cemented in schools through a hidden curriculum that permeates all facets of education and through the use of education as an oppressive tool rather than as a liberating tool. The hidden curriculum that perpetuates racism occurs every day in schools throughout the country (Leonardo, 2009). Castagno (2008) asserts that “students are being schooled in both the ideological and institutional aspects of whiteness even when teachers don’t say a word” (p. 324). This occurs by the curriculum of classes, courses, and grade levels being “tied up in the production valuation, and distribution of structural, or scientific, knowledge in ways that privilege whiteness” (Allen, 2004, p. 131). The supposedly “race-neutral curriculum” that is currently in place furthers institutionalized racism by failing “to address the inequities in power and race that proliferate throughout society” (Rogers & Mosley, 2006, p. 486). Apple (2003) posits that “education as an instrument of liberation...is a necessary...condition for social transformation” (p. 108). Education, when working to liberate people and overcome oppression, should reflect upon such oppression - in this case the educational oppression of minority students - to help bring about the needed social changes that produce a more equitable society (Apple, 2003, p. 108). However, schools and teachers often do not take the time to address race, racism, or other issues

with students and therefore “educational inequity is left to be understood as resulting from individual deficit” (Castagno, 2008, p. 328). At the same time, students are then silenced and separated which “allows whites to maintain the status quo” (Allen, 2004, p. 129). With education as a liberating movement, there would be encouragement to “critique white domination.” Instead all students naturalize unearned white privilege (Leonardo, 2009, p. 83).

The demographic structure and funding of schools and education policy helps to continue inequality and institutional racism. In the United States with districts being structured based on neighborhoods, the rampant segregation experienced within cities is also experienced inside of schools. Orfield (2002) found that “only fourteen percent of white students attend[ed] schools where at least three races comprise[d] ten percent or more of the total student population (p. 17). Orfield (2002) found that during the fourteen years before 2000, the great majority of school districts became more racially segregated (p. 17). Current systems for funding public education are based on property rights. The inequity of resources that occurs through funding leads to an “unequal distribution” of resources to “minority and poor students” within public education (Eitle & Eitle, 2010, p. 451; Rubenstein et al., 2008, p. 21). Such funding policies, according to Alemán (2007) continue “to disadvantage, discriminate, and oppress communities and students of color” (p. 548). Rubenstein et al. (2008) found that the relationship between funding for students and student demographics seems to worsen for states that are more racially and economically diverse (p. 21).

Proponents of Neoliberal educational policy disregard the inequalities that are apparent from the distribution of funding resources and the way school district

populations are structured. They view desegregation as destroying the quality of education (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 180). Education policy that is situated in inequitable funding and resources, as Apple (2003) asserts, makes white supremacy and institutional racism maintain prominence in the problems of education. Taylor and Clark (2009) claim that the known inequities that guide education provide evidence that “institutional racism is alive and well in school districts” (p. 128). These inequities will not go away even if supposed ‘achievement gaps’ are eliminated. Instead as Maxcy (2006) asserts, it is necessary to correct the structural inequality of funding and demographics that is a direct result of institutional racism (p. 279)

## **Race and Racism**

### **Definition of Race**

Race is a constantly changing social and political creation that serves to empower one group of people over another group or groups of people. Race is used to divide based on value-laden scientific or cultural “facts” that serve to define the dominant group as better or superior by labeling the other group or groups as inferior, unequal, or even sub-human (Allen, 2004; DuBois, 1998, Harris, 1998; hooks, 1998; Roediger, 2008; Wise, 2010). The dominant group in the case of race in the United States are whites, namely elite whites who initially used race to “systemize distinctions between Europeans and Africans” (Roediger, 2008, p. 5). To allow for the systemizing of these distinction to continue, the benefits of one race and the demerits of the other races are constantly being negotiated and changed by people and forces so the superior race becomes more exclusive or inclusive (Kincheloe, 1999). Race, in this matter, is constantly shape shifting and therefore not natural at all. Instead race is what Asumah (2004) refers to as a “socio-

political” entity which allows whites in the United States of America to continue their interests and dominance in politics and society (p. 503).

Race is used to place defined racial groups into categories. Through race, as Roediger (2008) states, people are put into “social categories” which produce and justify various levels of opportunity (p. xii). These categories throughout American history have worked to prohibit certain races from achieving economic, social, and political justice while at the same time allowing for and supporting the dominant white race to gain special access to economic, social, and political freedoms and rights (Roediger, 2008). hooks (2008) suggests that while the formal windows to special access for whites are no longer open, whites still benefit from the freedoms and accesses of the past (p. 42). The results make the study of such racial subjugation and white dominance necessary as inequities within American society are “bound up in race” (Hollingworth, 2009, p. 312). Inequities at the hands of white systemic control have made minority races experience worse health and health care (Wise, 2010), poorer education (Leonardo, 2009), less access to property and housing (Harris, 2008), and a lower economic status (Roediger, 2008).

### **Definition of Racism**

Racism is a structure that exists to establish the dominance of one race. Racism consists of processes, systems, practices, and institutions that promote the supremacy of one race while subjugating other races. Racism is not an individual act of bigotry, but a set of acts and policies that transform capital, science, law, and society into the property of the dominant race (Asumah, 2010; Dei, 1999; Harlow, 2009; Lipsitz, 1995; Terrill, 2009). As Asumah (2004) asserts, it is the institutions and controls that white people have

garnered throughout four centuries of constructing superiority that makes the domination of other races “viable.” Asumah (2004) explains that “from the village council to the national government, the same group has the marginal propensity to make most policies in America” (p. 504). Dei (1999) finds that it is through these institutional controls that minorities are excluded and oppressed economically. Harlow (2009) finds that it is through institutional controls that there arise agreements and behaviors which “reinforce the superiority and inferiority of one racial group relative to another” (p. 167). Racism then is not, never has been, nor ever will be about individual prejudice or bias, but is instead about the political policies which make economic and social superiority and inferiority legitimate within the United States (Harlow, 2009).

### **Whiteness and White Supremacy**

Whiteness is a system of domination through policies, decisions, and acts that whites use to violently or passively continue the subjugation and inequality of other races. Whiteness therefore continues white supremacy and the benefits that come with that supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, Gillborn, 2005; Leonardo, 2009). The purpose of whiteness is to delineate the superiority of whites from the constructed subjugation of other races (Howard, 2004). Leonardo (2009) supports the assertion of Howard (2004) by noting that whites gain an advantage by being placed in the category of the white race. Bonilla-Silva (2010) claims the advantages and dominance experienced by whites within American society transfers over into intellectual life. Vaught (2009) asserts that such dominance plays a key role in determining the norms of society. With whites being the dominant category in race, whiteness acts as the norm expected out of each person intellectually, socially, and culturally (Vaught, 2009).

Whites also act in manners which assure their continued dominance and superiority. The vast majority of time whites unknowingly or invisibly continue the superiority of the white race through their ideas and values. Among the primary factors are anti-structural ideas which assert that disparities are not the fault of organizational barriers or benefits. Another primary factor are individualistic ideals which suggest each person is free to fail or succeed on their own (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Leonardo, 2009; Tranby & Hartmann, 2008). The ambivalence or ignorance that whites experience in regards to race continues and perpetuates white privilege. I define white privilege here as the reward that comes within the United States of America for people that are born white. White privilege awards whites socially and politically, visibly and invisibly. Such rewards have created a society where members of the white race view themselves as normal and the definition of human, and compare all other races to the white skin color. These views have inflicted a false sense of superiority, righteousness, and destiny for the white race (Allen, 2004; Gillborn, 2005; Howard, 2004; Milner, 2007; Tranby & Hartmann, 2008; Vaught, 2009). White privilege is the guarantee for whites that whiteness is the civic ideal and that the world belongs to whites (Allen, 2004; Tranby & Hartmann, 2008).

## **Race and Discrimination**

### **Justification of racial discrimination**

Racial discrimination is often justified based on the belief that racial minorities are at a lower social position due to their own merit and not based on institutional racism of past eras (Lipsitz, 1995). McVeigh and Sikkink (2005) suggest that discrimination is allowed to be posited in this manner because of “patterns of structural differentiation”

which “constrain members of racial and ethnic minority groups” to a lower status than whites (p. 498). McVeigh and Sikkink (2005) further assert that because racial minorities are defined as being lower status, they are subjected to also being differentiated from the community and are never allowed to become “fully integrated” into society (p. 501). Soss et al. (2008) suggest that discrimination and the ability to not fully integrate racial minorities into American society operated throughout history institutionally and now modernly through “informal mechanisms such as peer pressure, socialization, group rituals, calls for responsibility, and stigmatization of deviance” (p. 537).

### **Discrimination through citizenship**

The first way in which discrimination kept racial minorities at a lower status is through the definition of who is an American citizen. Citizenship has been used since 1790 to determine who can have full access to American democracy, government, and society. Harris (1998) explains that the “Naturalization Act of 1790 restricted citizenship to persons who resided in the United States for two years, who could establish their good character in court, and who were ‘white’” (p. 117). Subsequent court decisions upheld the Naturalization Act and as Roediger states (2008) those decisions established further criterion that established whites as citizens and people of color as “unfit for citizenship” (p. 56). Haney-Lopéz (1999) finds that such actions made citizenship and superiority intertwined and therefore anything less than being a white citizen became inferior. Race came to be the vehicle for entrance into full citizenship within the United States. Whites were divided from racial minorities: whites were citizens - people of color were not. Therefore, whites were superior and people of color must be inferior (Roediger, 2008).

### **Discrimination through labor**

Racial discrimination also occurs through labor and workforce practices (Leonardo, 2009). Bell (1998) finds that racial discrimination works in large part to “facilitate the exploitation” of people in color in regards to labor. He asserts that such exploitation denies people of color “access to benefits and opportunities that would otherwise be available” (p. 139). People of color throughout history have been kept out of various labor opportunities and management practices have used them “as a reserve army of labor” who will work for less money and benefits (Roediger, 2008, p. 97). Labor inequalities and policies that justified the exclusion of people of color from working have also developed economic castes and classes (Leonardo, 2009). White workers accepted lower class positions economically than white elites because they still held social and economic advantages over people of color (Harris, 1998).

### **Discrimination through law**

Law has allowed racial discrimination and separation of rights based on race to continue (Vaught, 2009). The law upholds whiteness by keeping whiteness a privilege and therefore by keeping whites at the top of society (Bell, 1998). This has occurred by having Black rights and the rights of other people of color “sacrificed throughout the nation’s history” in favor of the interests of whites (Bell, 1998, p. 139). The Dred Scott decision held firmly that Blacks were in no way equal to whites and that the rights afforded to whites were therefore not afforded to Blacks (Bell, 1998; Roediger, 2008). Compromises have been made, wherein protection of Blacks was dropped for political gain (Bell, 1998; Roediger, 2008). Federally, the government, even in the ratification of

the Fourteenth Amendment, provided states and communities with powers to make their own distinctions based on race (Roediger, 2008).

### **Colorblindness**

Bonilla-Silva (2010) suggests that “when status differences between groups exist, as in the case between whites and Blacks, the advantaged group develops its own ‘groupthink,’ values, and norms to account for and rationalize these differences” (pp. 123-124). For many whites this development currently resides in the use of colorblindness to “articulate their views, present their ideas, and interpret interactions with people of color” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 131). Colorblindness relies on calls of “personal responsibility” and suggests that any actions that seek to surmount past racial discrimination as reverse racism, or “antidemocratic” (Bergner, 2009, p. 325). Colorblindness, according to Vaught (2009), allows whites to maintain interests in “rampant individualism” which makes white supremacy continue its hegemony (p. 585). Stemming from the hegemony, whites believe that the plight and lower class status of people of color is “the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and...cultural limitations” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 2). The racism behind colorblindness suggests that race no longer matters and any limitations that people of color experience is because “they [personally] do not work hard enough” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 3).

### **Use of colorblindness**

Colorblindness is used today to justify continuing the institutionalized racism that has been built throughout American history (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Colorblindness is able to suggest, that because of the post-Civil Rights era, and formal equality now being mandated, that “race has all but disappeared as a factor shaping the life chances of all

Americans” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 262). Allen (2004) asserts that the suggestion of formal equality leading to the complete disappearance of racism is flawed as he finds an American society which “is premised on white supremacy” (p. 127). Zamudio and Rios (2006) claim that “the notion of a ‘colorblind’ racism reflects the contemporary race project in its attempts to perpetuate existing structural inequality by obscuring the structural dimension of racial inequality (p. 484). Persistent racism through colorblindness still haunts racial minorities but is now nearly invisible to whites. Accusations and assertions by people of color of the existing racism still experienced fall on deaf ears or are met with skepticism because whites choose not to think of racism as still hegemonic and problematic (hooks, 1998).

### **The reproduction of inequality through colorblindness**

In refusing to address historical discrimination, and the formal and informal bonds of that discrimination, racism persists (Roediger, 2008). Asumah (2004) advises that the optimistic belief that racism is gone because formal commitments to white supremacy have been abandoned in present and future policy is false. The falsity arises because the historical policies of racism continue to make races unequal economically and socially. Whites, according to Zamudio and Rios (2006), are afforded material rewards through colorblind policies based on the historical structuring of racism, and those racist structures continue “the persistence of racial attitudes”, and the “activities [and inactivity] of institutions” which reinforce racism (p. 484). Roediger (2008) states that any time a reform is based on colorblindness as a principle, it will continue to “reproduce inequalities already in place” (p. 194). Leonardo (2009) suggests that if racism and “race

struggle” are left hidden, invisible, or neglected they will continue “at the level of social practice” (p. 64).

## **Race in Education**

### **The impact of informal segregation**

Racism, in the current colorblind and neoliberal American society, is “alive and well in school districts, both large and small” (Taylor & Clark, 2009, p. 128). One of the most common ways this racism is still experienced in schools is through segregated populations inside of a school (Orfield et al., 2002). Since 1974, Courts have typically reversed or loosened any attempts to desegregate schools (Orfield et al., 2002).

Segregation is still experienced by people of color in public schools through a commitment to “neighborhood schools” which are devised through local school boundary lines and district boundary lines (Bell, 1998, p. 147). Ending segregation is not to make schools appear visibly desegregated, it is “to end exclusion and to obtain opportunity” for people of color (Orfield, 2005). Racial discrimination in schools is supported with the legitimization of “housing segregation and school district boundary lines” (Orfield, 2005, p. 1041). With the addition of school choice in the fold, as schools integrate and desegregate through the inclusion of people of color, white students start leaving the school and looking for other options. Many of those options now come through private, charter, or home educational services (Renzulli, 2005). As whites are continued to be given advantage in schools through segregation, people of color are left to continue experiencing inequality in education, racial and economic segregation relate powerfully to inequality in educational attainment and opportunity (Orfield, 2005).

### **The impact of white cultural norms**

Race in schools through tying white cultural norms to success and achievement also continues white privilege and continues the punishment of people of color (Dei, 2001). Teachers prefer classroom behaviors that are “consistent with mainstream cultural” norms (Tyler et al., 2006, p. 1003). Two of these norms are competition and individualism (Tyler et al., 2006). Students that are competitive or individualistic are “perceived as being more highly motivated” and more likely to “obtain a higher level of achievement” (Tyler et al., 2006, p. 1002). Teachers also seem to prefer not to talk about race. In schools, teachers were observed as not wanting to talk about race as it was perceived to be “too conflict laden, tense, and hurtful and perhaps more importantly, implies that one is racist” (Castagno, 2008, p. 329). Most teachers are afraid to talk about race or did not have the skills necessary to do so. Such practices, Castagno (2008) found help to “perpetuate whiteness within” schools (p. 329). Administrators and teachers rely on muting protestations that make inequality visible and known (Taylor & Clark, 2009). Kincheloe (1999) posits that racism is continued through an unwillingness to provide students with opportunities to learn about the oppressiveness of whiteness throughout history. Instead, as Dei (1999) asserts schools, state departments, and federal departments construct discourses by selecting readings and knowledge that minimize people of color and justify white superiority

### **Campaign and Election of Barack Obama**

#### **Obama’s personal beliefs**

Obama’s personal beliefs on values and the pursuit of the American Dream seem to contribute to his beliefs on race. Obama’s personal values reflected by his governing

and his statements suggest that he believes in a purpose of the community for the betterment of the future. Rowland (2010) states that Obama values hard work and community. Such values, according to Schultz (2009), let us assume that Obama is inspired by chances to unite a community, not by the confrontation that might come through mandating policy or actions. Elovitz (2010) concurs in stating that Obama “is a reconciler” who approaches problems by bringing people together and listening to opposing parties (p. 104). Much of this value of reconciliation from Obama is shaped by his belief that each person brings a unique understanding to the “mosaic” of the United States and that because of that uniqueness, all American citizens have a “communal commitment to liberty and justice for all”(Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010, p. 610). With liberty and justice as clarion parts of his message, it seems evident that “Obama is concerned with global justice” and he works towards that justice “by tapping into the American ideal and possible future, rather than the American reality” (Schultz, 2009, p. 143). Schultz (2009) further asserts that Obama consistently focuses on the future and the possibility of a harmonious society in the future. It is a vision that according to Schultz (2009) is one of “believable change” which must be “built on the spirit of service and the many efforts of the many, duly aided by the more far sighted elites” (p. 129).

For Obama the American Dream incorporates individualism, the necessity of the market, and a government that works with people. In his American Dream, Obama sees the government and businesses as both being responsible for creating jobs and opportunities and each citizen as responsible for every other citizen (Obama, 2008). Obama walks a fine line between placing “all of the emphasis” for change on government and on placing all of the emphasis on “radical individualism present in a market-based

approach.” He considers both as necessary - and that individuals and the community are ultimately responsible for society (Rowland, 2010, p. 208).

The promise of America is not tied to what the government does, but is a larger social collaboration. The government is responsible for providing opportunities to individuals, but the rest of society is responsible for each other. Sweet and McCue-Enser (2010) suggest that Obama believes that “unified action” is “the primary means by which to overcome inequality and oppression.” The work of America and its citizens should always “contribute to the common hopes” of all Americans and not one individual or group (p. 612). Obama at the moment of his election saw America as in a dangerous moment of economic turmoil and international war which threatened what America stood for (Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010). Obama believes that the American Dream can be “reenergized by placing a focus on the entire community, as opposed to only one portion of it” (Rowland, 2010, p. 217). Obama often calls on this service of the people for the people and individual service for the greater good of American and also “calls on all Americans to continue the struggle for economical parity, educational opportunity, and social justice” (Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010, p. 613).

The ultimate problem of race, according to Obama, is in that it keeps people from achieving the American Dream (Rowland & Jones, 2011). Obama sees America as a work in progress that is left unfinished partly because of past systems of racism (Terrill, 2009). Obama acknowledges that within America there is a legacy of discrimination that “was passed on to future generations,” yet those inequalities only exist in that manner (Rowland & Jones, 2011, p. 137). In Obama’s view the anger that Blacks feel towards discrimination comes from “memories of humiliation” and discrimination and prejudice

that “prevented African Americans from achieving the American Dream” (Rowland & Jones, 2011, pp. 138-139). Whites, according to Obama, develop a building resentment over having to change their norms and privileges so the community experiences racial equity (Rowland & Jones, 2011). Obama sees dialogue and discussion about racial issues as necessary, but those conversations should be centered on the bigger goal of achieving the American Dream (Rowland & Jones, 2011).

### **Neoliberal commitment in policy**

Obama seems to follow a Neoliberal philosophy through his actions. Bonilla-Silva (2010) finds that Obama relies on market ideals and consistently evokes a “quasi-color-blind view about Race matters in America.” (p. 231). Sweet and McCue-Enser (2010) also find that Obama expresses responsibility through individualism and that individualism permeating into a “mutual responsibility” for society (p. 612). Another indication of Obama’s emphasis on individualism is through the continuous assertions that each person has the responsibility of bending “the arc of the moral universe...in the direction of justice” (Schultz, 2009 p. 151). The individualism, emphasis on market, and color-blind views of Obama firmly place him in the Neoliberal paradigm. As such, the “words and actions” of Obama “indicate that he will be effective at maintaining the status quo” and as Harlow (2009) asserts, he will not be a “leader prepared to challenge the terms of the racial contract” and the “social structural change” that will encourage “Black economic power” (p. 173).

Obama in his construction of policy suggests that the entire society is important for solving problems (Rowland, 2010). Obama, according to Rowland (2010), suggests that the “solution to the problems facing the nation” is through policies that allow

Americans to work hard and work together (p. 206). Obama uses policy to incorporate assistance for all people and not one and even “maintains that race is an inappropriate discussion for policy analysis” (Teasley & Ikard, 2010, p. 421). Elovitz (2010), studying Obama’s first year as President, notes that he “was able to rapidly advance his agenda,” however, that agenda was one constructed of universal policies concerning “foreign policy, health care, taxation, education, and environmental practice” and not constructed toward racial equity (p. 102). Roediger (2008) notes that any thoughts that Obama will provide solutions to race and racism through policy seem to be “apparently fruitless” (p. 229). Obama consistently offers “policies having to do with a color-blind safety net that does not directly deal with the reality of continued structural racism.” In this manner, he “ignores racism” and does not offer “any meaningful solutions” (Esposito & Finley, 2009, p. 167). As a direct result of this, Bonilla Silva (2010) fears that Obama’s policies are likely to increase “racial stratification” within the United States (p. xv).

## **Obama and Race**

### ***A More Perfect Union Address in Philadelphia***

The controversy revolving around a man close to the Obama family, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, “had every potential to destroy [Obama’s] campaign” (Rowland & Jones, 2011, p. 134). Obama and Reverend Jeremiah Wright had a long history, including Obama being a member of Wright’s church for 20 years, Wright being the official during the marriage of Barack and Michelle Obama, and Wright being the man credited for the title of Obama’s *Audacity of Hope* (Terrill, 2009, p. 366). Esposito and Finley (2009) assert that the speech in Philadelphia “was partly designed to distance [Obama] from the militant stance of...others on racial matters” including Reverend Jeremiah Wright (p.

167). Terrill (2009) asserts that prior to the speech Obama was “faced with a crisis that threatened to derail his bid to become the first African American major party candidate for president of the United States” (p. 363). Rowland and Jones (2011) suggest that “Obama’s presidential ambitions were on the line” prior to *A More Perfect Union* in Philadelphia.

Obama espoused his views on race on March 18, 2008 in Philadelphia to “save his campaign and carry forward the discussion of race in America” (Rowland & Jones, 2011). Rowland and Jones (2011) find that in *A More Perfect Union*, Obama confronted “issues of race” in three stages: first by centering his campaign on the American Dream, second by locating race as limiting possibilities to achieve the American Dream, and third by asserting that solving race problems is by making “the American Dream available to all citizens.” At no point in his speech does Obama “resolve issues of race,” instead he only posits ways to work past those issues so they no longer matter (p. 127). Through the speech, Obama claims America and its founding beliefs are incomplete because of their relationship with race (Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010). Obama sees the Constitution as made to allow ‘equal citizenship under the law,’ but glossed over with compromises that made true equity able to be ‘perfected over time.’ It is in this way, as Rowland and Jones (2011) suggest that Obama views the race problems of the United States as “part of the national narrative of moving toward a more perfect union (p. 135). Obama uses narratives of individuals to explain how Americans overcome “significant challenges” even those based in “the pain of racial conflict” (Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010, p. 610). Terrill (2009) finds that Obama seems to be “able to transcend the color-line” throughout the speech. In this manner, he does not believe his emergence would usher in a truly post-

racial America, but believes his speech and the actions that might come from it might help America realize a better future (Terrill, 2009, p. 365).

Throughout the speech, Obama noted that the citizenry was the most important and most necessary component to overcoming the problem of race. Obama insists that universal coverage that helps all Americans is the best way to improve racial conflicts (Rowland & Jones, 2011). Rowland and Jones (2011) suggest that “Obama did not paper over racial conflict or the racial injustice that remained a major problem in the United States” (p. 134). Instead Obama insisted that racial conflict could only be overcome by all citizens working together to achieve the American Dream reality (Rowland & Jones, 2011). Obama posited in his speech that it was up to the people to overcome race and racism, leaving government free of the responsibility (Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010). Rowland and Jones (2011) found that Obama viewed the government as responsible for providing universal programs for all citizens concerning education, welfare, and health care as a way to narrow and eliminate racial disparities.

In the speech, Obama made it very clear on what caused the problem of racism within the United States, and once again suggests it’s more individualized than institutionalized. Obama does note that white people must realize discrimination is a reality for Blacks (Terrill, 2009) and that segregation causes inferiority which develops achievement gaps in education and income inequity throughout the economy. Obama finds that the most pernicious aspects of segregation and discrimination are that they lead certain members of the community to experience frustration, “violence, blight, and neglect” (Terrill, 2009). Obama first “strategically refocused the debate” to focus on how the greed and corruption of individuals were the two factors responsible for “past and

existing racial strife” (Teasley & Ikard, 2010, p. 419). Obama once again individualized race by being able to explain to whites the anger that racial discrimination had caused certain individuals of the Black community, and such anger sometimes “distracts” and even keeps the Black community from understanding their “own complicity” in the current condition of Blacks in America (Terrill, 2009, p. 371). Obama also seems to forgive whites for racial prejudice and their wishes for continued supremacy by suggesting that statements that are provocative towards white supremacy and domination are divisive and distort what America is really about (Rowland & Jones, 2011). Obama also finds it disingenuous to believe that whites should not resent the special privileges afforded to people of color to stem inequality. He believes that whites are right to have “legitimate concerns” about anti-racist policies that might widen ‘the racial divide,’ and that might block ‘the path to understanding’ (Terrill, 2009, p. 371).

Obama’s *A More Perfect Union* speech in Philadelphia tried to build understanding between Blacks and whites by describing how racial anger has built throughout American history. It also defines how his candidacy as President provides evidence that America is now transcending race. The speech resulted in Blacks and whites “feeling that an important breakthrough had been reached in race relations” (Robinson, 2009). According to Rowland and Jones (2011) Obama’s approach concerning race in Philadelphia was met with “universal praise” for his honesty in confronting “the complexities of race” (p. 126). After the speech, the controversy “largely dissipated” and “Obama was praised by many for honestly confronting the most controversial and emotional issue in American politics, race” (Rowland & Jones, 2011, p. 125). The way Obama presented his thoughts on race “persuaded many that Obama had

the values and judgment to serve as president and that he might be able to lead us down the road to a society in which what would matter most would be the content of our character” (Rowland & Jones, 2011, p. 145).

### **Obama as viewed by whites**

The ascension of Obama into national prominence has led to developments based in racial constructs. Whites view Obama and his family as honorary whites - “exceptions to their race...in appearance, demeanor, affect, etc.” Obama and his family are seen as enjoying “privileges traditionally reserved for people classified as whites” (Esposito & Finley, 2009, p. 168). However when he steps away from this honorary status he constantly “risks the charge of racism” by stepping away from the norms of the dominant discourse prevalent in the white dominated society. Comments and assertions in which he explicitly sides with Blacks on controversial issues have led to the decline of his approval ratings (Enck-Wanzer, 2011, p. 28; Rowland & Jones, 2011). In the occurrences of Obama siding with people of color on controversial issues, it is assumed that he has “a debilitating fixation on one side of the color-line” (Terrill, 2009, p. 379). Notable media personalities such as Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck have not only taken racially inflammatory jabs at Obama, they have also developed an idea that Obama hates white people and white culture (Elovitz, 2010). The emergence and “persistence of rumors about Obama being a foreign-born Muslim” highlight the fear of a person of color becoming leader of the country which could symbolize the development of whites as a minority within America (Elovitz, 2010, p. 113). While his policies concerning health care and the economy suggest to some whites that Obama is an enemy to America (Elovitz, 2010).

## **Obama and colorblindness**

Obama relies on neoliberal components of the colorblindness, individualism, and the denial of racism to approach race and racism within America. Obama, in his denials and rejections of race being “a significant dimension of politics or society,” helps to perpetuate white dominance and the attacks against him supported by racial prejudice (Enck-Wanzer, 2011, p. 28). Obama suggests race has been used as “a political tool” that is designed “to prevent people from working together to make a better nation.” Obama also believes that “the only way to surmount the [race] problems of the past was to move forward together” (Rowland & Jones, 2011, p. 145). Obama does not believe that whiteness and racism are endemic to the United States (Terrill, 2009). For Obama, race and racism is only “one manifestation of the failure of the nation to provide opportunity for all” (Rowland & Jones, 2011, p. 137).

Esposito and Finley (2009) suggest that Obama’s use of “color blind discourse” and the de-racialization of his candidacy helped him be successful in the 2008 presidential election (p. 167). Obama downplays “the reality of racism” which hints that he embraces colorblindness (Esposito & Finley, 2009, p. 166). Robinson (2009) finds that Obama is an advocate of color-blind policies. These, as Enck-Wanzer (2011) state, constrict Obama to operate within a colorblind discourse which binds him “to subtly (and not so subtly) racist discourses” (p. 24). The colorblind optimism concerning race “has the potential to engender a false sense of hope” which may ultimately mask “the realities of gross racial/ethnic disparities and inequality and worsening economic conditions” (Teasley & Ikard, 2010, p. 420).

Hinting at the neoliberal and colorblind value, Obama finds that Blacks must “embrace” individualism so that they assume responsibility over their own lives (Rowland & Jones, 2011, p. 140). Obama sees the struggle of Blacks being comparable to those of white women and white men who have lost jobs (Terrill, 2009). He also finds that while there may be limitations associated with race that hold back Blacks, Blacks must have a belief in their individual abilities to overcome (Terrill, 2009). In this manner Obama comforts whites by insinuating that racism is dead, that Blacks are partially responsible for inequality, that the American Dream is viable for all, and that everyone has equal chances for success through individualism and meritocracy (Harlow, 2009). Harlow (2009) further asserts that “an Obama presidency will have no significant impact on the creation of social equality and full citizenship rights” for people of color because Obama continues “the language of freedom, democracy, and individualism” which “maintain white, global dominance” (p. 166).

### **A desire to transcend race**

Obama often tries to transcend race which has substantial consequences. Roediger (2008) asserts that Obama “reflect[s] an overwhelming desire to transcend race without transcending racial inequality” (p. 217). Bonilla-Silva (2010) notices “Obama has displayed a long-standing attempt to be if not beyond, at least above the racial fray” (p. 219). Robinson (2009) finds that a major reason for success of the Obama campaign “was in moving ‘beyond these old arguments’” (p. 214).

Obama’s statements further suggest his desire to transcend race personally and as a nation. Obama often suggests, according to Rowland & Jones (2011) that “race may be transcended” by achieving the American Dream (p. 136). Obama has stated that there is

no Black America, there is no white America, and that Black issues are more myths than realities (Esposito & Finley, 2009, p. 166). Obama also often asserts that sentiments concerning racial resentments by Blacks or whites are used to stop society from progressing forward (Rowland & Jones, 2011). These statements to push towards transcendence have consequences. Harlow (2009) notes Obama reinforces “the dominant racial frames and discourses” through neglecting and avoiding race and racism throughout his campaign and presidency (p. 169). Enck-Wanzer (2011) concurs with Harlow by asserting that “Obama is doing little (politically or rhetorically) to challenge hegemonic whiteness or racial neoliberalism” (pp. 27-28).

The effect of Obama’s desire to transcend race is problematic. Obama, as Love and Tosolt (2010) acknowledge, “does not transcend race.” Instead, Blacks continue to be viewed as inferior and Obama acts as “a perception of unity” which makes “whites feel comfortable” by distancing himself from Blacks and the stereotypes whites hold of them (Love & Tosolt, 2010). Esposito & Finley (2009) espouse that the presidency of Obama “has further legitimized the problematic assumption that...race is no longer ‘an excuse’ for racial inequality in this country” (p. 165). Stemming from Obama’s election, language, and policies, there are assertions that “race and ethnicity centered social policy mechanisms aimed at reducing social inequities” should end as they are unfairly discriminatory towards whites (Teasley & Ikard, 2010, p. 412). These effects elaborate upon the caution of Robinson (2009) that Obama “represents a further step in the wrong direction” in concerns to race relations (p. 221).

## **Symbolism and the Election of Obama**

The election of Obama, as seen by Cannella (2009), “has resulted in a restored belief...in the United States as a society that would address social inequities, support diversity, and engage in the continued struggle to increase social and economic justice” (p. 768). Obama signifies hope that a whole community, and the whole nation, can solve each and every problem faced (Rowland, 2010; Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010). Obama is the embodiment of a “strengthened American Dream” (Rowland, 2010, p. 205). Schultz (2009) notes Obama has “an extremism of hope” which sees political democratic mobilization as the way to change institutions and processes (p. 154). The candidacy and election of Obama brought with it a renewed sense of the power of democratic mobilization and “ushered in a new feeling of optimism in America” (Teasley & Ikard, 2010, p. 418).

### **Obama as symbol of progress**

Bonilla-Silva (2010) claims that the election and “phenomenon” of Barack Obama symbolizes the “racial transformation” that occurred throughout the 20th Century (p. 213). Robinson (2009) and Esposito and Finley (2009) both find that many believe Obama’s election signals that “racial progress” is being made in the United States (p. 164). Harlow (2009) concurs, suggesting that “Obama is the reliever of white guilt” and is also the signifier that the United States “is finally racism-free” (p. 166). In the election of Obama, Harlow (2009) finds it allows for people to suggest the “evidence that the United States is a meritocracy” and all people are not held to standards based on race but on ability (p. 165). Part of this allowance Elovitz (2010) believes comes from Obama’s

“difference” in terms of race, Americans were inclined “to project great hopes or fears” upon him and what that meant for the present and future of the United States (p. 103).

### **Within the Black community**

With Obama’s election, there is a belief that Blacks “have reached the highest stratum of American political life” and are therefore no longer subjected to racial discrimination (Robinson, 2009, p. 215). Obama, like all “Black elected officials,” represents Blacks “in the public sphere not only politically through policy and legislation but also symbolically (Robinson, 2009, p. 216). Blacks widely support Obama according to Robinson (2009) because he offers “a decent and wholesome image of Blackness that can challenge the denigrating and hurtful stereotypes” that dominates much of society (p. 216). This is problematic as Obama has never really centered himself on the Black community or Black issues (Schultz, 2009).

### **Effects of Obama’s symbolism on the Black community**

Obama, in the words of Robinson (2009), assumes “greater distance from the political interests of Blacks, and has even taken more decisive steps in retreat from issues of racial inequity” (p. 220). Blacks, in the era of Obama, are likely to experience profound beliefs and messages “of harmony that excludes Black issues” and also endure “racism and discrimination” (Love & Tosolt, 2010). Bonilla-Silva continues by stating that the presence of “a Black man in charge gives the impression of monumental change” and concurrently “allows whites” to believe that “racial inequality” is no longer significant or even experienced within the United States (p. 233). Esposito and Finley believe that “Barack Obama might further reinforce the need to be acceptably Black” and therefore might make true racial equality even more unattainable (p. 169). Obama

therefore blinds “Americans to the realities of continuing racial inequities” (Love & Tosolt, 2010).

## **Policy, Presidents, and Education**

### **Policy Speeches**

Presidential speeches delivered to an audience, and the public in general, serve to establish a national philosophy and provide commitment to certain policies. In research by Firestone and Harris (2006), they found that “leaders may well produce a dramatic short term impact with effective, credible communication” (p. 908). If one oration turns into a series of speeches, a coherent and consistent message is also likely to “build a course of...policy or action” (Staton & Peeples, 2000, p. 309). Speeches to the public do not only serve policy purposes though, they can also showcase the philosophy of the president or the philosophy he wants the public to adopt. Part of this influence is through images and metaphors. By controlling certain images and metaphors, and using them repeatedly, a president can shape educational policy and the educational philosophy of the country (Carpenter, 2005; Staton & Peeples, 2000). With knowledge that leaders can create ‘short term impacts with effective, credible communication’ and that leaders can use metaphors, philosophy, and coherent and consistent messages to move forward educational policy, it becomes essential to study what leaders believe about the purpose of public school and education (Carpenter, 2005, p. 279).

A ‘problem definition’ is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction with an existing circumstance” (Portz, 1996, p. 372). Portz continues the definition by stating a ‘problem definition “is an assertion that particular conditions, such as student test scores, fail to meet acceptable standards” (Portz, 1996, p. 372). Portz also suggests that these

'problem definitions' provide the "range of policy options" to be debated and the "terms of policy debate" itself (Portz, 1996, p. 382). The 'problem definition' currently put forth by presidents and other policy makers is that America's schools are inadequate and incapable of meeting the demands of a rapidly changing society (Portz, 1996, p. 371). As policy makers rally around this educational 'problem definition' newspaper articles on educational issues have "largely doubled since before the release of *A Nation at Risk*" (Ginsberg & Lyche, 2008, p. 25). The combination of policy makers defining education in the 'problem definition' mold and newspaper articles taking a negative tone towards education, has led the public to internalize education as a prime policy concern (Ginsberg & Lyche, 2008, p. 25). Educational policy, agendas, and national dialogue suggests to the public that that education "is now a weak link in our culture" to be remedied and fixed (Ginsberg & Lyche, 2008, p. 25). The remedies and fixes for education are then carried out through policy initiatives set forth through "governors, state legislators, members of Congress, and U.S. presidents" (Carpenter, 2005, p. 279).

Agenda setting distributes power within American politics (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005, p. 127). In educational policy, Meier (2002) found three factors that limited federal influence over education. The first of these is that the federal government relies on distant local school districts to educate children and implement policy. Secondly, the federal government has trouble monitoring school district behavior and implementation. And third, the federal government is unable to clearly influence the "key policy levers at the macro level" (Meier, 2002, p. 227). However, it is wise not to "underestimate the ability of the federal government to set the agenda" (Meier, 2002). Concerning education, presidents and other policy makers have used a 'problem definition' approach to

influence policy, nationalize the debate over educational policy, and set the educational agenda. The limits of the federal government in formally implementing an agenda as put forth by Meier are counteracted by the use of ‘problem definitions’ to help set the agenda. In education the shift from the original intent of Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 into the current movements in educational policy as discussed earlier in this review of literature comes from policy makers setting the agenda by criticizing current education efforts. Education then falls into the findings of Davies (2008): even the boldest of “departures in policy become embedded in the fabric of American politics...and become, if not impregnable, then at least firmly resistant to assault” (p. 627).

### **Speechmaking and Presidents**

Like other policy makers, the president is thoughtful about the agenda setting decisions he and his administration put forward. Presidents, unlike other policy-makers, are “uniquely situated to affect the national agenda” because of the institution of the presidency (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2004, p. 181). In modern times, one of the most important aspects of a president’s duty is the influence he brings to establishing a policy agenda (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005, p. 127). In effecting the national agenda, presidents have the most ability to set or influence a policy agenda if they give it high priority within their platform (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005, p. 136). The influence and high priority given to a policy agenda comes first through when “presidents prioritize an issue through their public statements” (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2005, p. 135).

The president communicates to the public through speaking and speechmaking. As Cohen (1995) found, these speeches can affect the policy agenda and concerns of the

public (p. 101). Cohen (1995) found that the public gives an eminent accord to the president that transfers over to the credibility of the statements the president makes. Because of the accord of credibility given to presidents, the public “listens to all that presidents deem important” (p. 102). As presidents increase the mention of specific policies, the awareness of the public and their concern surrounding the issue also rise. Cohen (1995) found that presidents do not even have to offer “substantive positions,” and instead could rely on the mere mention of a policy to the public to raise “public concern with the policy problem” (p. 102). Presidents, therefore, are able to influence the public’s attention and concern for policy issues through speeches. Addressing the public allows presidents to “take their case to the American people through various rhetorical activities to drum up public support for their policies” (Barrett, 2004, p. 338). Barrett (2004) also found that “if the president is successful in creating public support, he can then translate that support into public pressure on Congress to act” in support of his policy agenda (p. 338). Furthermore, Barrett (2004) found that as presidents increased the number of remarks they make on a policy issue, the more success that issue will achieve when going through the legislative process in Congress (p. 356). More recent research by Eshbaugh-Soha (2010) echoes the finding of Barrett (2004) in claiming that presidential speech increases the success of the president in moving a policy agenda through Congress (p. 431).

### **Presidents and Education**

Beginning with the very first president, our country’s presidents have defined education as important for the nation (Carpenter, 2005, p. 284). In American history, presidents have repeatedly avowed two major reasons for public education: preparing

citizenry and economic stability (Carpenter, 2005, p. 279). While citizenry and economic stability have consistently been a feature of presidential speeches concerning education, other reasons also have been apparent. In Carpenter's research, he found that ideals of self-realization and human relationship development played insignificant roles in the rhetoric of presidents concerning education. Instead presidents seem to have chosen to rely on civic responsibility and economic purposes for education. In the past century, even these two purposes for education have shifted with economic efficiency getting mentioned as the main purpose of education twice as often as civic responsibility (Carpenter, 2005, p. 286). This has especially occurred since 1960. For the last forty years of the 20th Century, presidents used education to combat economic problems. In the 1960s, presidents sought through speeches to alleviate poverty. In the 70s and 80s, presidents opined that education would help America "work smarter and more productively." And in the 1990s, education became important for the new "knowledge economy" (Carpenter, 2005, p. 280).

At the same time as education and economy have become intertwined, presidents are mentioning and using education in speeches at unprecedented rates. Since 1960, each president that has entered office has mentioned education an average of over one hundred times per year (Hess & McGuinn, 2002, p. 73). In comparison, for the first 124 years of the presidency, presidents mentioned education an average of twice per year (Hess & McGuinn, 2002, p. 73). Correlating with that is the fact that only President Washington and President Grant even mentioned public schooling as being a factor in the prosperity of the nation (Carpenter, 2005, p. 187). Now, America has presidents consistently bringing up education in speeches, and when doing so, pointing to the economic purposes

of public schooling (Carpenter, 2005). Presidents in the case of education become advocates for policy changes through the speeches they make to the public (Barrett, 2004). The shifting of the content of presidential speeches and the purpose of education they set forth seems to make citizens appear as if they have lost interest in educating youth for civic duty, and placed prominence on educating youth instead for economic efficiency (Carpenter, 2005, pp. 287-288).

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study will perform a critical discourse analysis which will analyze the speeches and remarks that President Obama has made concerning education to determine whether his speeches perpetuate neoliberal principles and therefore perpetuate racism within public education. This critical discourse analysis scrutinizes the representations, assumptions, legitimations, and discursive knots that President Obama uses to justify his education policy agenda and work to change the public's opinion of the purpose of schooling. It also conveys how such statements and justifications could lead to either dismantling or strengthening the status quo of racism within public education.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

The research methodology utilized within this study is critical discourse analysis. Essentially qualitative in nature, critical discourse analysis seeks to apply a critical lens to the legitimation, expression, and constitution of language and discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Critical discourse analysis developed in the last two decades of the 20th Century. It was started and developed into a basic framework by the work of Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teejun Van Dijk, among others. Critical discourse analysis, from its beginnings in the 1980s to now, has "grown into one of the most influential and visible branches of all discourse analysis" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 447).

When employing critical discourse analysis in any research, loose and flexible interpretations of the framework provide guidance for the researcher. Rogers (2004) even claims that critical discourse analysis has no formula. Just as other critical theorists, a critical discourse analyst "wants to produce and convey critical knowledge that enables

human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7). How that is done is up to the researcher. Wodak and Meyer (2009) elaborate on this by positing that critical discourse analysis "has never been and has never attempted to be or to provide one single specific theory. Neither is one specific methodology characteristic of research in [critical discourse analysis]" (p. 8)

Despite this lack of formulaic guidelines, critical discourse analysis as used by researchers should mainly focus on how discourse develops and is developed by the abuse of power, and the resulting effects of injustice and inequality (Liasidou, 2008). In order to do this, the researcher employing critical discourse analysis must be concerned with "the relationship of language and discourse in the construction and representation of this social world." Above all else, critical discourse analysis allows the researcher to explain how relationships form and continue, while also allowing the researcher to purposefully describe and interpret those relationships from his own perspective (Rogers, 2004, p. 3).

To build upon the basic premise of critical discourse analysis outlined in the previous paragraph, Liasidou (2008) finds critical discourse analysis to be a research tool best used for emancipatory practices. One of the most frequent purposes of research utilizing critical discourse analysis is to expose how language and discourse by the privileged is used to maintain, sustain, or even intensify various inequalities faced within a society (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Critical discourse analysis may also be able to detect how certain power relations can lead to the dismissal of other positions, beliefs, and practices, and in so doing, infringe on human rights (Liasidou, 2008). It is important for

the researcher to focus on the practices within these power relations. The duty of the critical discourse analysis researcher is to hone in on a particular social problem that develops through discourse concerning how social practices develop as activities, how social practices become represented, or how the social practice itself promotes inequality and injustice (Liasidou, 2008).

The basic identity of critical discourse analysis is dependent upon all three words within critical discourse analysis itself. First, critical discourse analysis must be critical. Secondly, it must also be concerned with discourse. Finally, it is not enough to detect the discourse, the researcher must also analyze such discourse through a critical lens.

### **The Critical Part of Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis originates from critical theory. Critical theory suggests that the purpose of the theory is to not only critique society, but change society. This contrasts with traditional theory which only operates to explain or better understand society (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Anyon (2009) suggests that critical theory “references systematic thought attempting an explicit analysis toward social justice” (p. 2). Anyon (2009) also cites the use of critical theory in educational research as a way to help “yield an adequate understanding of the problems, issues, or solutions” that envelop, surround, or problematize schools (p. 3). Wodak and Meyer (2009) elaborate on the purposes of critical theory by advancing two core concepts. Firstly, they maintain that critical theory “should be directed at the totality of society in its historical specificity.” Secondly, “critical theory should improve the understanding of society by integrating all the major social sciences, including economics, sociology, history, political science, anthropology and psychology” (p. 6). This second purpose of critical theory aligns closely with

Giroux's (2001a) assertion that a core piece of critical theory stems from "the need to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions" (p. 8). This research project draws heavily upon Giroux's (2001a) statement that critical theory should provide a "distinction between the world it examines and portrays, and the world as it actually exists" (p. 8).

In developing this distinction, it is the responsibility of this research to answer the question that Fairclough (2003) asserts: "how do existing societies provide people with the possibilities and resources for rich and fulfilling lives, how on the other hand do they deny people these possibilities and resources?" (p. 202). This question not only describes the purpose of critical theory as deconstructing structures, purposes, and outcomes of hegemonic power, but also assures an understanding of how policies may be of benefit to society and its members, or may be of detriment to society and its members. The rationale for critical research is that "there are winners and there are losers" in social transformations such as neo-liberalism, globalization, and capitalism, and because of this dichotomy it is necessary to respond through research to these issues that increase opportunity gaps and centralizations of power (Fairclough, 2003, p. 203).

Fairclough (2003) suggests that language is transformed by those in power and working to continue transformations towards neo-liberal beliefs, capitalism, and globalization is transformed to meet their needs and desires (p. 203). He also suggests that language "has in certain key respects become more salient, more important than it used to be, and in fact a crucial aspect of the social transformations which are going on" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 203). The key influence and saturation of language in society can have a tremendous impact on the way people think of policy, construct their own values,

and cultivate understanding. From 24 hour cable news networks to the inexhaustible and unrestricted information database that is the internet, citizens have the capability to be inundated with language. Key figures including the President of the United States has continual opportunities to speak to groups, the nation, and the world through the existence of ubiquitous media. The impact of the language the President uses may be of great significance in continuing or countering the hegemony of social transformations such as neo-liberalism.

The capabilities of the President in impacting people in this way is necessary to study, and this research will do so through analyzing the speeches and statements he makes to groups and audiences. To ensure that this critical discourse analysis maintains itself as scholarly research, there are key principles that must be in place. The researcher and the audience must be aware of the intentions of the researcher and the research that is being done. These intentions are to study the relationship between discourse and domination, that guide the theory and the method of critical discourse analysis. Within each individual research project, the researcher must reveal the power relationships important to the study and disclose how such power relationships may result in embedding inequalities within society (Rogers, 2004). Rogers (2004) suggests that the researcher locates social problems and then analyzes “how discourse operates to construct and is historically constructed” by those social problems. In order to accomplish this effectively, the researcher must work from an “analysis of texts to the social and political texts in which the texts emerge” (p. 4).

## **The Discourse Part of Critical Discourse Analysis**

Discourse is key to understanding and uncovering power relationships and their ability to create and continue inequalities and injustices. Fairclough (2003) defines a discourse as “a particular way of representing some part of the (physical, social, psychological world)” (p. 17). He delves deeper by proffering that “discourses differ in how social events are represented, what is excluded or included, how abstractly or concretely events are represented, and how more specifically the processes and relations, social actors, time and place of events are represented” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 17).

In other words, as Rogers states “discourse both reflects and constructs the social world” (Rogers, 2004, p. 5). Through such reflection and construction, discourses work to provide acceptable frameworks for how one talks, thinks, and acts by institutionalizing and regulating the conversations and language deemed acceptable by those in power. By means of such reinforced and regulated thought, action, and language those who exert power employ the methods over those that do not and in doing so create inequality and injustice (Jager & Maier, 2009, p. 35).

It is through such methods that it becomes too limiting to think of discourses as only ideological. Discourses - the ways of talking within a society - are manifested and manifest not only the beliefs of that society, but also the “subjects and reality” of that society also. It is within this frame of discourse that two effects of discourse are situated. First, discourses create and maintain consciousness at the individual and mass level. Secondly, the action that is created by such consciousness and discourse helps to create reality at both the self and mass level (Jager & Maier, 2009, p. 37). Link and Link-Heer realize this as the “power of discourse.” This power derives from “the fact that discourses

delineate a range of ‘positive’ statements, which are sayable. This means that they simultaneously inhibit a range of other statements, which are not sayable” (Jager & Maier, 2009, p. 37).

### **The Analysis Part of Critical Discourse Analysis**

The mere fact that discourses are not solely ideological, means it is necessary and appropriate to study the creation and ramifications of discourses on the social world. Such a study cannot solely expose the discourse, but instead needs to expose the prevailing discourse and interpret and analyze how that discourse impacts the society. The analysis in critical discourse analysis studies is based not only on what is ‘sayable,’ but also on what is ‘unsayable.’ Or in other words, “not only what is present [within the text], but what is absent” (Rogers, 2004, p. 7). Critical discourse analysis must take into account that the subject that is being studied is a “product of discourses” (Jager & Maier, 2009, p. 37). An analysis of any subject therein must be concerned with what discourses led to the phenomenon being shaped into its studied form and what impact continued discourses will have on the subject as time moves forward.

In order to do this, critical discourse analysis relies on analyses of context to determine, understand, and interpret the use of language. As there is no strictly (or even loosely) defined framework for critical discourse analysis, it is up to each researcher to work through or frame the problem of which texts and language to include. The researcher, after determining the frame for the issue he is researching, must also be cognizant of the changing contexts over time. As attention is paid to language, and the way it shapes and is shaped by the studied subject, the researcher must realize that

previous constructions and previous discourse and practices have shaped the discourse being studied (Rogers, 2004).

Analyzing text and language is fluid. This might account for the original designers and definers of critical discourse analysis decision to keep the methodological approach open and flexible. It is necessary for any researcher conducting a critical discourse analysis project to be aware of two posits that Fairclough lays bare. First, any analysis of a text is going to be incomplete. There is an impossibility of giving a “complete and definitive analysis of a text.” Secondly, an analysis of texts is also “inevitably selective” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 11) The questions that the researcher asks and then analyzes in the text limits the focus and scope of the analysis. A researcher must ask questions about the relationship between discourses and power as they fit with the overall research project. This inevitably narrows an analysis of any text, as it is impossible to focus on everything presented through discourse (Fairclough, 2003, p. 11). The researcher, therefore, has to create and hone questions that match the topic - and then stay focused on those questions without falling into the temptation of analyzing another, yet less salient, point in the discourse.

### **The questions for this Critical Discourse Analysis**

In the review of literature in Chapter Two, the core tenets of neoliberal philosophy and policy within United States education were outlined as were the methods in which racism thrives and is perpetuated inside of United States education.. The focus on these two issues within the review of literature ultimately leads to the questions that will be employed in this critical discourse analysis project. The questions are as follows:

1. What educational philosophy does President Barack Obama communicate through the selected speeches?
2. What aspects of race are communicated through the speeches of education policy of President Barack Obama?

These questions, which surround the discourse evident in the statements and speeches concerning education of the current administration, will serve as the guide for the analysis and research findings in Chapter Four. The rest of this chapter will go into detailed explanation of how the framework of critical discourse analysis will be employed to answer these questions and what that means for current and future public education policies, philosophies, and practices in the United States.

### **The Identification of the Discourse**

The first step in identifying the necessary discourse to analyze is to determine who the key figures are; in the case of this research project the term ‘author’ will be borrowed from Fairclough (2003) to highlight the key figures presenting the discourse. Using Goffman's (1981) connotations, Fairclough develops a three pronged argument to justifying the use of the term ‘author’ in a sense broader than its usual definition. The most basic definition of ‘author’ as Fairclough denotes is “the one who puts the words together and is responsible for the wording.”

There are, of course, instances where the President of the United States may not be the one writing the text word for word, yet he is the ‘principal’ and the ‘animator’ of each text. Fairclough summarizes the ‘principal’ as “the one whose position is put in the text” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 12). While various speechwriters, aides, and others may have influence on the exact grammatical wording of a speech or statement given by the

President, the position that is taken and legitimated within such speeches and statements can be fairly easily seen as being that of the administration. While the President is the ‘principal,’ the President is also the ‘animator’ – ‘animator’ meaning “the one who makes the sounds” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 12). The use of the word ‘author’ throughout this research project should be noted as the person who is both the animator and the principal. Even though the ‘author’ might not put the words directly onto paper, he is the one responsible for the principles and positions presented and he is the one responsible for putting those words into oration and into the ears of this society. Therefore, it is this use of ‘author’ that will be used when referring in the abstract to the President throughout this research project.

In identifying the relevant discourse to analyze, it is also necessary to determine what type of discourse such an analysis should bring into question. Jager and Maier (2009) call for critical discourse analysis to be limited to one plane of discourse to ensure a concise argument that does not stray off topic. In the case of this research project, the plane of discourse will be limited to the transcripts of speeches and statements given by President Barack Obama in the seven addresses mentioned in Chapter One. Jager and Maier (2009) also suggest that the study of discourse within an analysis be limited to one sector of discourse to further squelch the possibility of a meandering research project. The sector in this research project is limited to the administration that came into power with the inauguration of President Barack Obama in January of 2009. While President Obama is not the progenitor of neoliberal educational policies, he and his administration currently have the power to influence educational policies and the beliefs of American

citizens concerning education and educational policies. The purpose of this research project is to analyze and uncover such influence.

In order to complete this analysis and uncover such influence, it is necessary for the researcher to determine the relevant texts that should be fully analyzed. As stated in the previous paragraph, the plane of discourse for this research project focuses on speeches and statements, while the specific sector of that plane is the speeches and statements of President Obama. I will collect, read, and analyze transcripts of the seven speeches or statements outlined in Chapter One and given to audiences by President Obama. The data to be pulled from these speeches and addresses will help determine the ways in which President Obama focuses discussion and attention of educational policy, and how that communication could impact racism in education. These will be collected through searches of the official transcripts openly available at the Official Federal Department of Education website ([ed.gov](http://ed.gov)) and the Official White House website ([whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov)). All transcriptions will then be collected before being placed into the graphic organizer described in the next section of this chapter. It is essential for this research to analyze a comprehensive list of the transcripts of the speeches and statements of the President. As Jager and Maier (2009) suggest a single text has less of an impact and its effects are barely noticed and virtually impossible to prove. By focusing instead on the patterns that develop, the phrases and sub-topics reiterated constantly, and the strategies presented as ways of advancing a discourse to become a social event, the research can determine the sustained effects that occur through time and the emergence and maintenance of certain ideologies and practices within educational policy.

## The Doing of the Critical Discourse Analysis

This research project's chief concern is in answering the two research questions outlined previously in this chapter. In order to do this, the analysis must be concerned with the social effects of texts, and also the ideological and causal effects of texts (Fairclough, 2003). The first step necessary in answering the questions outlined above is in creating a path of starting and completing the analysis of the various speeches. This path will follow the suggestions of Jager and Maier (2009) in performing a structural analysis of a discourse strand. This is a six step process to help begin the analysis of the speeches and statements of the President and how those influence educational policies and philosophies. The steps are as follows:

1. *List of all articles of relevance for the discourse strand is compiled.* In the case of this research project, the articles of relevance are the speeches and statements from President Barack Obama. These speeches and statements will be the first step in creating a graphic organizer. The graphic organizer includes the official title of the speech or statement, and the date on which it was given. This list is first divided by chronological date from speech closest to inauguration to speech closest to modern day. Collecting data in a chronological order could help me determine the discursive entanglements, how recent historical matters are represented, and how any points of educational policy may have shifted over the first term of President Obama. This graphic organizer is in Appendix A of this proposal with all transcripts of speeches and remarks following behind in chronological order.

2. *Structural analysis should roughly capture the characteristics of articles on particular aspects of interest.* This research project will also take into account the various groups who are privileged to be the primary audience of the individual speech or statement. Specific arguments promoting one educational policy or philosophy over another might become more evident when identifying the various audiences that are immediately in the presence of the author. These audiences could influence the arguments made and the vocabulary employed among other variables.
3. *A discourse strand encompasses various sub-topics. These are first identified and then summarized into groups.* The sub-topics that will be focused on throughout this research project are those that were identified as the tenets of current United States education policy in the review of literature. These are again: (1) the development of economic standards, (2) the support of school choice, (3) the construction of definitions for teacher quality, performance, and education, and (4) the emphasis on academic excellence and education. The reasons for including such sub-topics will be shown in steps four and five of this process.
4. *Examine with what frequency particular groups of sub-topics appear.* In choosing the tenets as sub-topics, the researcher can focus on the assumptions that are made when a tenet appears. More precisely, the analysis can determine which sub-topics are focused on and what is left as unsaid. Noted absences could be made conspicuous through such an analysis and can help to evaluate the Principal's adherence to or divergence from neoliberal education philosophy and policy.

5. *Examine how sub-topics are distributed over time.* The goal of this research project is to comprehensively examine the President's alignment with neoliberal education policy and philosophy; such alignment could increase or decrease over time. By analyzing what sub-topics appear most often throughout the course of this administration, or what is left unsaid throughout the course of this administration, the analyst may be able to develop a better understanding of the President's commitment to holding on or displacing neoliberal education policy and philosophy.
6. *Discursive entanglements are then identified.* This step of analysis will determine which topics and sub-topics are linked together by the author. This analysis will determine how the policies and philosophies of the administration are promoted and made available for the audiences to act, think, and talk upon. What is left either unsaid or unidentified as entangled does not give the audiences the opportunity to act, think, or talk upon as relevant and recognizable as part of the education policy and philosophy of the United States.

This process is emergent to some extent, as this formula might not fully capture the process needed to fully answer the research questions. This discourse strand and the accompanying graphic organizer are at the 'micro' analysis part of discourse and text (Fairclough, 2003). In order to legitimize this research project as not just an analysis, but as a critical analysis, a 'macro' analysis component must also be available and utilized (Fairclough, 2003). This 'macro' analysis is concerned less with the analysis of the individual texts or the synthesis of those texts and more concerned with how the results of that analysis can show the power relations working across audiences, across the United

States, and the possible development of inequalities and injustice stemming from the administration's possible adherence to neoliberal education policy and philosophy. The construction of this research project will have Chapter 4 focus on answering the two research questions and providing evidence concerning those two research questions. Chapter 5 will delve into the critical aspects of how the statements and language constructions that President Obama uses may continue educational and racial inequity.

Reiterating what Fairclough (2003) said in that no analysis of a text can be complete, it is up to the individual researcher of critical discourse analysis to understand when they are finished with their research. Jager and Maier offer up two ways of helping the researcher acknowledge when the analysis is full. The first of these methods is when the research "fully captures the qualitative range of what can be said and how it is said" (Jager & Maier, 2009, p. 51). In other words, once the data and analysis of the available discourses no longer lead to subsequent findings, then the analysis can be as complete as possible. The second way of acknowledging this incomplete completeness is when the researcher finds that the arguments made throughout his analysis of the texts begins to become redundant or repetitive (Jager & Maier, 2009, p. 51). I will hold myself to these same standards in determining completeness and full analysis throughout this project.

### **The Focus of this Critical Discourse Analysis**

The focus of this work of critical discourse analysis is on how the structure of the discourses in the speeches and statements of President Barack Obama represents the educational philosophy of this administration and how that philosophy may continue racial inequity. In order to extract such structure of discourse, this research will focus on four main tools in analyzing discourse: representation as recontextualization, assumption,

legitimation, and discursive knots. Through analyzing each text and the accompanying sub-topics concerning the tenets of neoliberalism, this analysis will provide a detailed look at both the said and unsaid realities of current public education policy and philosophy according to this administration.

## **Representation**

Representation as recontextualization according to Fairclough (2003) recognizes the discourse of one text, or social event, and brings it into the broader sector and plane. In this case, the representation of each individual speech or statement will not only be analyzed as independent entities, but also analyzed by how it is influenced by and influences the broader sector and plane. To achieve this level of representation as recontextualization the research must uncover what is present in the speech or statement. In other words, according to Fairclough (2003), “which elements of events, or events in a chain of events are present/absent, prominent/backgrounded” (p. 139). The research must also analyze the level of abstraction and generalization and how that differs from the prior and subsequent concrete events. The third part of analyzing a text in this way is by analyzing the arrangement - in other words the order of the speeches and statements and why they might be ordered in such a way. The final component of this tool is in researching the additions to the speech or statement, such as the causes, reasons, or purposes of the speech or statement and any evaluations (by the author or others) that might have come after the speech (Fairclough, 2003).

## **Assumptions**

The second tool to use through the analysis of the speeches and statements is what Fairclough defines as the universal and the particular. Fairclough (2003) states that “a

measure of the successful universalization of such a particular representation is the extent to which it figures in this way as a background assumption in a wide variety of texts” (p. 46). It is within this tool that the research will be focused on which assumptions are made, said, or possibly left unsaid and how those relate to the current power structure of neoliberalism currently in place in educational philosophy and policy in the United States. Fairclough (2003) believes that assumptions play an important role in determining the underlying ideology of an author. The analyst can determine this through the premise of ‘common ground.’ Common ground, in this case, means the shared meanings that can be taken as given without recurrent communication of social events to structure those meanings. This ‘common ground’ also usually is able to help determine the dominant and hegemonic factors that underlie the discourse and the texts (Fairclough, 2003). Such factors can lead to the development of assumptions - once a measure of educational policy or philosophy is dominant and institutionalized as an assumed part of public education in the United States, there is no longer a necessity to continually mention that measure throughout the resultant discourse.

In total, Fairclough (2003) outlines four types of assumptions that may become evident throughout a critical discourse analysis. The first of these are presuppositions - the existential, propositional, or value assumptions that are evident in a text. Existential assumptions are those assumptions concerning what exists. Propositional assumptions are concerned with what is, can be, or will be the case. Finally, value assumptions are assumptions based on values and morals: that which is good and desirable (Fairclough, 2003). The second type of assumptions are those that are logical implications - or meanings which can be inferred by the surrounding language and the features of that

language. The third type of assumption is what Fairclough (2003) calls the ‘standard conversational implicatures.’ These are statements that are offered according to normal conversation norms - giving the required information in a precise and relevant manner without overstepping bounds. The final type of assumption according to Fairclough are the “non-standard conversational implicatures.” These implicatures are the exact opposite of the previous assumptions. Non-standard implicatures rely on avoiding being explicit in strategic in direct ways (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 59-60). Through analyzing the various types of assumptions that may underlie the speeches and statements studied, the research can ascertain the possibility of the hegemonic power that certain neoliberal tenets might have within discourse surrounding educational policy and philosophy.

### **Legitimation**

The third tool this research project is going to utilize is that of analyzing legitimation. As he did with developing a criterion for what constitutes various assumptions, Fairclough again brings forth four various ways that text helps to legitimate social events - in the case of this research, the various ways that speeches or statements may legitimate neoliberalism within education policy. The first way that a text is legitimated is through *authorization* - by referencing traditions, customs, laws, and prior persons that developed institutional authority. Fairclough's second type of legitimation is through *rationalization* - the actions that have been institutionalized by society and the resulting validity of those actions. Thirdly, Fairclough mentions that *moral evaluation* also is a key legitimation practice which seeks to legitimate a stance by referencing certain moral or value systems that others will adhere with. The final legitimation practice used in discourses is mythopoesis - the use of a narrative account to convey what

is legitimate (Fairclough, 2003). In analyzing the various speeches and statements through investigating the legitimation practices put forth in them, the analyst can uncover patterns which may develop, overreliance on certain forms of legitimation, or even the absence of legitimation.

### **Discursive Knots**

The final focus of analysis is on the discursive knots that become evident through speeches. These knots, put forth by Jager and Maier (2009), align various topics within one statement. In the case of this research, the analysis of discursive knots will focus on when public education is mentioned within the same phrase or sentence. The reason for focusing on discursive knots is that such knots help to create, maintain, or enhance assumptions. Such knots, when used frequently and commonly, work to strongly solidify particular beliefs, knowledge, or action within a society. The discursive knots defined by Jager and Maier echo the earlier discussion of discursive entanglement. Both the knots and the entanglements serve to brace certain beliefs, actions, or texts next to each other to strengthen their overall position in society. If those knots and entanglements are not made to be evident or made at all, no strengthening will take place and the discourse might even be weakened.

### **Justification of this Critical Discourse Analysis**

The critical discourse analysis of the speeches and statements of President Barack Obama is necessary and justified for the simple reason that these speeches and statements convey more than ideology. The speeches and statements not only have ideological ramifications - shaping the ideology of the audience listening to the discourse, they also have effects on social change (Fairclough, 2003). In focusing on the language and

discourse that is portrayed both in the 'micro' analysis of individual speeches and statements and in the broader 'macro' analysis, the evolution of education policy during this administration can be legitimately constructed and explored. During this time of numerous calls for education reform, the speeches of the President (whom has the power to outline policy objectives) are important. They not only serve to promote certain ideologies of education reform, by leaving out other education reform possibilities, the speeches of the President essentially limit the thoughts, actions, and discussions that the public can have concerning public education.

It is their impact on social change through limiting the discussions, actions, and thoughts of the national public that make analyzing these speeches and statements especially important. Discourse does not only change ideology. Discourse changes the actions and the future discursive events based on that change in ideology. If the analyses of these speeches show that a certain ideology is being developed, it is this ideology that will lead to not ideological shifts, but social shifts. With the administration having the power to shape this discourse most readily through their speeches and statements, it becomes evident that how they position themselves through discourse will shape not only how the country thinks about education, but how it acts upon education.

The administration has the power to develop the society's beliefs, actions, and conversations concerning education. The researcher, in analyzing these speeches and statements, does not believe that any speech or statement concerning education made by this President is meant to maliciously create inequality or injustice. Yet as is suggested by Jager and Maier (2009) there may be differences between what the author means and how the society interprets that meaning to fit or create their own beliefs and actions.

If it is found that the administration's speeches and statements are aligned with neoliberal tenets, the researcher feels he can safely suggest that these neoliberal tenets will help to communicate educational policy and philosophy that promotes injustice and inequality within United States public education through continuing white dominance. In the same vein, if the alignment of educational policy to neoliberal tenets is evident, this analysis can help to change the discourse of the greater society in hopes of changing the practices that lead to injustice and inequality.

At the beginning of this section, it was mentioned that the simple justification for this research project was that the speeches and statements of the President shape the ideology and social change. By not analyzing the discourse that is promoted by the President and instituted and maintained by the greater society, possible injustices and inequalities may continue to occur within the American public education system.

### **Researcher Bias, Identity, and Assumptions**

Critical discourse analysis comes with its own limitations. Any research endeavor choosing to employ critical discourse analysis cannot be objective. Fairclough posits that "there is no such thing as an 'objective' analysis of a text, if by that we mean an analysis which simply describes what is 'there' in the text without being 'biased' by the 'subjectivity' of the analyst" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 14). As a person, the analyst cannot be objective in his analysis of a text. Within that text the researcher will interpret and construct meanings in ways that are relevant to him depending on the values and the knowledge that he has developed previous to this research project. Any interpretation is dependent upon such values and knowledge to construct a meaningful understanding (Fairclough, 2003). The researcher completing this project believes he is cognizant of the

values and knowledge he brings to the analysis of the texts, and how those values and knowledge could shape the overall analysis.

While a critical discourse analysis cannot be measured through the standard modes of reliability and validity, critical discourse analysts should be aware of other issues that are likely to ensure the soundness of the research project. The first of these is that the analysis should be able to withstand criticism and objection. Such analysis must be effective, cogent, and effectual (Liasidou, 2008). This is determined by the presentation of the data and the thorough and full analysis of that ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ analysis according to the data. Wood and Kroger continue by stipulating that any analysis should be based on supported, acceptable, and convincing evidence that flows with the rules of logic. In adhering to these principles, the analyst can provide an analysis which clearly defines the constitution of the discourse – and how that constitution functions and produces ideological shifts and social changes (as cited in Liasidou, 2008, p. 494).

Accompanying those basic limitations of critical discourse analysis, the analyst also has his own biases and assumptions that must be brought to the forefront. As with most researchers who are interested in the critical paradigm, the critical discourse analyst must take a stand (Jager & Maier, 2009, p. 36). This stand occurs in acting as an advocate for groups that are treated in unjust or unequal ways in society (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). It is often through previous discursive processes that the critical researcher finds himself working as an advocate. In the case of this analyst, the discursive processes that encouraged the commitment to this research project were led by the works of Erich Fromm, Paulo Freire, Zeus Leonardo, W.E.B. DuBois, and Henry Giroux. Other authors were also influential in the discursive formulation of this researcher’s ideals. It is through

the development of these ideals, the resulting changes that the discourse played in shaping the researcher's identity, and the desire of this research to make others more aware of the dynamics of discourse in shaping educational policy and philosophy within the United States that the researcher wants to make known.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this critical discourse analysis was to examine how the political speeches, addresses and statements of President Barack Obama knowingly or unknowingly continued practices and policies of white supremacy within educational policy and practice by constructing education in a neoliberal frame. There has been previous research concerning how current educational policies and practices may in fact perpetuate inequity and racism within education (Alemán, 2007; Canfield-Davis et al., 2009; Klaf & Kwan, 2010; Miller et al., 2008). Yet there still exists a gap concerning how such policies and practices are promoted to the American people. Through analyzing the discourse used in speeches and remarks concerning education, a discussion concerning the role the President plays in continuing racism within education can take place and advance into more research opportunities. This is essential in the academic field as whiteness still dominates the classroom, the school, and federal education policy. Whiteness does this by making teachers unable to discuss race, distributing racial minority students to high poverty population schools unequally, and decreasing the years of experience teachers have inside of a high minority population school when compared to high white population schools (Castagno, 2008; Wise, 2010).

In order to complete this study, the researcher focused on two main research questions to identify how President Obama may have conveyed an agenda that reinforces white supremacy in elementary and secondary public education through neoliberal policies and practices. The two research questions are as follows:

3. What educational philosophy does President Barack Obama communicate through the selected speeches?

4. What aspects of race are communicated through the speeches of education policy of President Barack Obama?

In order to complete this analysis and uncover such influence, it was necessary for the researcher to determine the relevant texts that should be fully analyzed. I collected, read, and analyzed the transcripts of the seven speeches or statements outlined in Chapter One and presented to audiences by President Obama. The data was pulled from these speeches and addresses to help determine the ways in which President Obama focused discussion and attention of educational policy, and how that communication may impact racism in education. The data was collected through searches of the official transcripts openly available at the Official Federal Department of Education website (ed.gov) and the Official White House website (whitehouse.gov).

## **Greater America**

### **America's Greatness**

The first two speeches chronologically – January 21, 2009 and March 10, 2009 - of this data established the course for President Obama's belief in the greatness of the United States, where that greatness developed, and how it will continue to move forward. He paid the most attention to this issue during his Inaugural Address, and followed up with a brief mention during a speech to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Yet, while he spent the most time on American greatness during the Inaugural Address, he summed up his view on the strength of America on March 10<sup>th</sup> by stating “the founding promise of the nation” was “that we can make of our lives what we will; that all things are possible for all people” (Obama, 2009b). This simple phrase is a reiteration of claims of individualism and meritocracy that permeated his Inaugural Address. Throughout his

Inaugural Address Obama posited that America was built and strengthened by individuals above all. Obama (2009a) first characterizes that change in America has come from “the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things” and it was through the efforts of individuals that carried America “towards prosperity and freedom.” Obama (2009a) then followed this invocation of individualism later with the idea that greatness in America “is never a given [but] must be earned.”

Later in the Inaugural Address, Obama again reinforced meritocratic and individualistic principles for the national audience his speech was targeting. In calling for the United States to meet a critical time in American history, he maintained individuals should bear the brunt of the work. His assertion that “the determination of the American people” is the primary determinant of the success of the nation invoked the idea that the government is of secondary importance in the strength of the United States (Obama, 2009a). Obama (2009a) further iterated what will make America successful once again through a call for “hard work.” ‘Hard work’ for Obama (2009a) is one of the ultimate values that has progressed the nation to its place as a world power, and he asserts that it is a value and truth that should be returned to. On March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009 Obama again called for those truths to be returned to in order for the United States to maintain its preeminent place as the economic leader of the world. Yet, instead of leaving this call for abstract truths to tighten the United States together, Obama outlined concrete ways that Americans through ‘hard work’ can keep the United States strong. He mentioned cutting costs of health care and transforming energy usage, but in this speech, at this moment is where he asserted unequivocally that America has to “do a far better job than we’ve been doing of educating our sons and daughters” and part of what education needs to do is

provide children with “the knowledge and skills they need in this new and changing world” (Obama, 2009b).

### **National Crisis**

In three of the speeches studied, Barack Obama elicited the idea of an immediate national crisis. The first two speeches occurred within the first three months of his presidency. At the Inaugural Address on January 21, 2009 President Obama asserted that the nation was in a severe crisis, one that had rarely been seen throughout the history of the United States. This crisis, according to Obama (2009a), needed swift, bold actions that would alleviate the problems facing the country as he entered into the Presidency. He cited concerns of the nation being at war, the economy being “badly weakened” through “greed and irresponsibility” and the failure to “make hard choices,” and increasing costs of health care and increasing failure of the nation’s schools as indicators of the national crisis. On March 10<sup>th</sup> of 2009, less than two months after his original claims of the crisis facing the nation, President Obama reiterated his diagnosis of the current state of the American society. At a speech to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce President Obama (2009b) stated that the economic problems and crises facing the United States were “unlike anything that we have ever seen in our time.” Just as he did during the inauguration, President Obama communicated that the economy and education both played a role in the struggle that the country was facing. These mentions are the only time in this data where President Obama specifically mentioned the immediacy of the crisis facing the nation.

President Obama, however, did mention the economy in a more reflective tone on July 29, 2010 in an address to the National Urban League. He asked the audience to

remember back to the two years before - the summer of 2008 - and stated to the audience that, “our economy was in freefall. We had just seen seven straight months of job loss...And we were on the verge of a financial crisis that threatened to plunge our economy into a second Great Depression” (Obama, 2010a). A year and a half after taking office, President Obama no longer elicited the need to take the “bold, swift action” he mentioned in his Inaugural Address, instead he highlighted those swift actions his administration took that prevented an “even greater catastrophe” (Obama, 2010a). Obama (2010a) framed the crisis as a predominantly economic crisis, and made note that each action his administration had taken had been for economic purposes including health care reform and education.

### **Question 1: Educational Philosophy Communicated to the Audiences**

#### **Education as an Economic Issue**

*“A world-class education is more than a moral obligation.  
It is an economic imperative if we want to succeed in the  
21st century.”*

*President Barack Obama - October 19, 2010*

In October of 2010, in remarks President Barack Obama made at the signing of the Executive Order for the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, President Obama seemed to convey his philosophy concerning education most completely. While in certain speeches, President Obama quivered between the idea of education as a moral issue for each child and as an economic issue for the benefit of the entire country, President Obama, in this statement, came down stringently in asserting that education is first and foremost an economic issue. This assertion can be broken down in three various forms: (1) how President Obama purposes

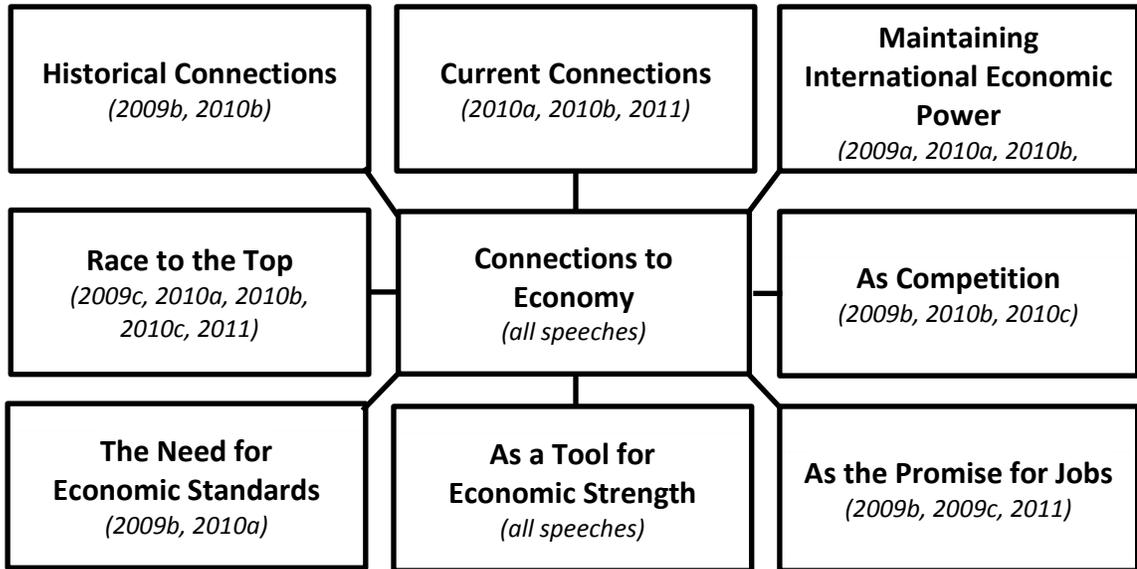
education, (2) what President Obama means by economic imperative, and (3) the focus of education.

President Obama's purposing of education is evident in the phrase "if we want to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Success is tied directly to economics. Success is tied directly to outcompeting and out-achieving each and every other country in the world. The way to outcompete other nations economically is to make sure that American students are out-achieving the students of other countries. There is no doubt that Obama (2010c) ties education straight to the economic vitality of the United States. Not only does Obama undeniably tie education to economic strength, he also subjects other purposes of education. They become less important, less readily available to discuss, less necessary to incorporate into the learning of American children. Chief among these, and even named in the statement, is the moral imperative of education. Obama instead aligns education to serving economic interests. This reinforces the technical rationality that dominates education and American capitalistic society.

In stating that education is an economic imperative, President Obama allows for those organizational entities and constructions that correlate with the economic influence over education to maintain their hegemony. As an economic imperative, education is tied to economic standards that define whether or not a child or group of children will be successful and compliant members of the labor force to continue to out-compete other countries industrially. As an economic imperative, education becomes the forbearer to the future success or failure of America in international competitions of producing the most gross national product or the most capable soldiers to fight against other countries. As an economic imperative, education is positioned into a market orientation which makes

school choice possible, makes white flight possible, and makes children have to go to school based on the wealth and privilege levels attained by their parents and more distant ancestors. As an economic imperative, education is most concerned about efficiency and achievement, not equality and justice, not virtue and civility.

This statement President Obama makes alleging education to economic purposes becomes even more evident in the use of “we.” Who is we in this context? We seems to be the Americans that actively fight against the economies of other countries. We seems to encompass those Americans that are pursuing economic progress and economic strength. The we promoted seems to overpower the individual child of the classroom. The child instead becomes a worker, a laborer, a servant, to the greater we. And not in a way that makes that child more civically responsible, but in a way that dehumanizes and narrows the purpose of the child. Instead children are now the ones that serve on the front lines of competition against other countries. The only way to outcompete other countries in economic growth, in economic vitality, is through the work of the youth. We, it can be said, do not care about the individual growth of a child. We do not care if he knows how to read fully, only that he knows how to read in ways that will ensure economic growth. We do not care if she knows how to interact with others in democratic engagements; we only care if she knows how to interact with the technology that will lead to greater prosperity. We do not care if a child is ethical; we only care that they are efficient. We do not care the steps a child takes to understand and build their own knowledge; we care only that they can meet performance criterion that show whether or not they live up to economic standards. This is the economic imperative. This is the overshadowing that President Obama adheres to in this statement. Education is not for individuals. Education



**Figure 1.** The connections that President Barack Obama made between education and the economy in the seven speeches of the studied data set.

is not for the individual growth of youth, not for their own empowerment, emancipation, or freedom. Education is *far more* than that. Education – school – is for the economic strength of the nation.

President Obama’s willingness to communicate the connection between education and the economy went far beyond this one statement. In the seven speeches analyzed, Obama made continuous assertions to the tight intertwining between the economy and public schooling. These assertions came in numerous ways. The findings point to President Obama connecting the educational world to the American economy in eight different scaffolds. Figure 1 visually shows the various ways in which Obama connects education to the economy. Listed below the ways of connection are the speeches in which President Obama makes the connection. As can be seen, the connections are continuous and are spread across all of the seven speeches analyzed.

### **Historical connection between education and economy.**

There is ample evidence that President Obama connected education to the economy throughout this data (Obama, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2011). He mentioned the connection explicitly in each of the speeches analyzed. Obama consistently stated the connection between education and the economy was historical. He made this connection clear in statements made on March 10, 2009 to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and October 14, 2010 to a Youth Town Hall sponsored by Black Entertainment Television. On March 10<sup>th</sup>, Obama (2009b) claimed “economic progress and educational achievement have always gone hand in hand in America.” He supported this claim by citing the importance of land-grant colleges and high schools in helping to industrialize the nation through training; through the GI Bill which developed a middle class in the American economy; and “investments in math and science [which] gave new opportunities to young scientists and engineers all across the country” (Obama, 2009b).

Remarks by the President at the BET Youth Town Hall on October 14, 2010 reiterated his commitment to making the historical connection between education and economic progress visible. In these remarks, he left high schools and land-grant colleges in the abstract and stated the development of public schools in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century allowed the United States to have “more skilled workers than any nation on Earth, which meant that we were more productive than any nation on Earth” (Obama, 2010b). He then combined the GI Bill and investments in math and science by stating that the GI Bill “massively expand[ed] our commitment to college education, and that meant we had more engineers and we had more scientists and that meant we had better

technology, which meant that we were more productive and we could succeed in the global marketplace” (Obama, 2010b).

Obama (2009a; 2009b) in his first two speeches when he spoke of the nation’s greatness credited the individuals of America for as the primary tool in moving America forward. Yet in these two pieces of data he seemed to assert that the role of the government was the primary tool. Through creating a public school system and land-grant initiatives, through the GI Bill, and through investments in science and math, Obama (2009b, 2010b) seemed to convey that the government had historically led to the success of America in the global marketplace.

#### **Current connection between education and economy.**

The connection between education and economy that President Obama spoke of was not just in the past tense. Often throughout the data, Obama implored a present and future connection between education and the economy. President Obama, in three different speeches, laid bare the importance of education to the economic well-being of the United States. In a speech to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People on July 29, 2010, Obama clearly and consistently defined education as an economic issue. First, he cited education or the lack of education as being at least in part responsible for the unemployment rate by claiming education is “an economic issue when the unemployment rate for folks who’ve never gone to college is almost double what it is for those who have gone to college” (Obama, 2010a). Obama (2010a) immediately followed the connection between unemployment and education by citing the need for education to provide training for jobs by claiming “eight in ten new jobs will require workforce training or a higher education by the end of this decade.” In a final utterance of

the connection between education and the economy, President Obama (2010a) used education as an indicator of viability and American superiority across the globe. In the speech to the NAACP he ended his connection between education and the economy by imploring education is “an economic issue when countries that out-educate us today are going to out-compete us tomorrow” (Obama, 2010a).

In later statements, President Obama seemed to further contend that education is a national economic priority first. On October 14, 2010, to the Youth Town Hall sponsored by Black Entertainment Television, Obama (2010b) stated that the national “commitment to education...had made America the wealthiest, most successful country on Earth.” The elicitation of both the government’s commitment to education and education’s role in making the United States superior to other nations further confirms that Obama conveyed education as a necessity for national economic purposes. This elicitation is perhaps strengthened even further in his visit to TechBoston on March 8, 2011. At this speech, in front of high school students at TechBoston in Boston, MA, President Obama (2011) clearly indicated his views of education. He stated “as a nation, we have a moral and economic imperative to give every child the chance to succeed.” Education, President Obama seemed to continually suggest education is most importantly an economic issue that should provide jobs and training for students and continue to make the United States superior to every other country in the world.

### **Education and maintaining international economic power.**

As mentioned above, data seems to suggest that President Obama consistently communicated education as a means to compete against other countries. In six of the speeches in this data set, President Obama mentioned the importance of education in

continuing America's international economic dominance. From the very first speech in this data set – the Inaugural Address – to the last speech at TechBoston, Obama clearly indicated the economy needs education in order to fend off advances from other countries in reaching economic superiority. President Obama (2009a) in his inauguration called for the transformation of “schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age.” This came soon after his call for “bold and swift action” to reestablish economic strength within America. The close associations of these two calls seem to suggest that “the demands of a new age” are first and foremost economic in nature.

Obama seemed to clarify and extend this call into a national concern in his remarks to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in March of 2009. At this speech Obama (2009b) stated that the “decline of American education is untenable for our economy, it's unsustainable for our democracy.” He closely followed in the same phrase with the assertion that the decline of American education is putting the American Dream at stake (2009b). Only after that assertion did he move into why the American Dream is at stake and why the economy and democracy in America suffers with an educational decline – and the move is into international competition. Citing a statistic that 8<sup>th</sup> graders in America are completing a curriculum “two full years behind top performing countries,” Obama (2009b) used that statistic to suggest that it allowed for “economic decline.” Using the word decline so closely after the phrase “top performing countries” automatically performed a comparison between countries – a comparison in which the United States is not leading. For Obama, the failure to be performing at or above the levels of other “top performing countries” in education will cause the United States to suffer economically, which in turn puts the American Dream at stake.

In the same speech, President Obama also stated the importance of teachers to the economy. In stating his case for the Recovery Act which provided funds to states and districts to keep “hundreds of thousands of teachers and school personnel” employed, Obama (2009b) asserted educators are “rendering a service our nation cannot afford to lose.” Without citing anything other than the importance of education for economic viability throughout the speech, Obama’s assertion of the service of teachers seems to suggest that teachers are invaluable for the machinations of the American economy as it seeks to compete against other nations.

Sixteen months later in July of 2010, President Obama used an address to the National Urban League to once again communicate education as an economic imperative to allow for America to outcompete other nations. In a series of assertions, President Obama (2010a) recognized education as “a prerequisite for prosperity.” While prosperity may trigger thoughts of individual prosperity and wealth, Obama (2010a) instead immediately followed this claim of education being “a prerequisite for prosperity” by claiming Americans have “tolerated a status quo [in education] where America lags behind other nations.” The President justified this claim again by using international statistics comparing “college completion rates” and international comparisons of eighth graders in math and science (2010a). In citing these statistics immediately after his claim that “education is a prerequisite for prosperity,” President Obama provided the audience with the notion that nothing less than first place in international rankings of science, math, and college completion will ensure economic prosperity for the United States.

Later in 2010, as his Presidency advanced forward, Obama seemed to strengthen his affirmation that education is a battleground against other nations. On October 14,

2010, to the BET Youth Town Hall, Obama in talking of public education stated “China is not playing for second place. Germany, South Korea – these are all countries that are investing massively in education. We’ve got to do the same thing.” President Obama once again relied on education as a competition, specifically this time, by mentioning investments in education. The phrase “playing for second place,” placed the ultimate focus of education on being an international competition. Education in this sense is something that will help determine the prosperity of countries. His communicated fears of other countries “not playing for second place” are further addressed five days later on November 19, 2010 in remarks at the signing of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. Through other countries investing more and outcompeting students in college completion, in science, and in math Obama (2010c) suggested that those countries will “out-compete us tomorrow.” The morality of education, in providing every person the opportunity to learn is secondary to Obama at this point in time. While he did mention the “moral obligation” of providing a “world-class education,” Obama (2010c) suggested there is a bigger component to education – “an economic imperative” that will be responsible for the success of America in this century. For Obama during the speech, educational success, as in his earlier speeches, determined economic success. And economic success is important in order to not be in second place, to not be out-competed against by other nations.

In the last speech of this dataset, on March 8, 2011 – titled “Winning the Future” – President Obama again reaffirmed the notion that education is important as a major factor in competing against the rest of the world. While at the Inaugural Address, education served to “meet the demands of a new age” (Obama, 2009a) and then later

became a competition among nations (2010a, 2010b, 2010c), it is something far more important here. Talking of the need for educational investment, Obama (2011) stated “a budget that sacrifices our commitment to education is a budget that sacrifices our country’s future.” For Obama (2011), education was not just about ensuring economic prosperity and viability, but also about nation building. He called for American teachers to be treated with the same respect as their South Korean counterparts who “are known as ‘nation builders’” (Obama, 2011). The coupling of these statements – the importance of education in sustaining a secure future for the United States and the nation building aspect of education – reaffirmed his earlier calls for economic dominance through education. To get to economic dominance, to be able for the United States to claim we are “winning the future,” Obama (2011) called on education to provide “higher standards and higher expectations; more time in the classroom and greater focus on subjects like math and science.”

### **Education as competition.**

The call for “higher standards and higher expectations; more time in the classroom and greater focus on subjects like math and science” (Obama, 2011) are to help American students outcompete other nations on international tests. Throughout the speeches in this data, Obama consistently and continually relied on international tests to validate the success or failure of United States education.

The use of international statistics first appears in this data in the speech to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in March of 2009. Obama took the time in this speech to list the decline of American education in international rankings. In math, eighth graders had “fallen to 9<sup>th</sup> place” (Obama, 2009b). Obama (2009b) stated that “just a third

of our 13- and 14-year olds can read as well as they should.” He also iterated that “America has fallen from 2<sup>nd</sup> place to 11<sup>th</sup> place in the portion of students completing college” (Obama, 2009b). While stating these statistics, he also took the time to use international statistics to highlight success. President Obama (2009b) specifically mentioned the fact that Massachusetts “8<sup>th</sup> graders are now tying for first – first in the whole world in science.”

Obama cited the success of Massachusetts 8<sup>th</sup> graders as the result of “forward-thinking” policies designed by the Massachusetts state government. This “forward-thinking” for Obama (2009b) must continue and he specifically mentioned who was in control of making it continue – the “nation’s governors and state education chiefs.” It was these administrative officials, outside of the local control of schools and districts that are responsible for “developing standards and assessments” to determine the abilities of students to “possess 21<sup>st</sup> century skills like problem-solving and critical thinking and entrepreneurship and creativity” (Obama, 2009b).

Although Obama (2009b) cited “problem-solving and critical thinking and entrepreneurship and creativity” to be “21<sup>st</sup> century skills,” he continued to use 20<sup>th</sup> century international assessment comparisons to provide proof of the decline of American education and the subsequent peril it places upon the economic viability and security of the American future. In his first two statements during 2010 in this data, Obama used international comparisons as measures of failure and decline. In July of 2010, to the National Urban League, President Obama used college completion rates to speak of educational decline and cited that America “used to be number one, now we’re number 12.” He followed that at the Youth Town Hall on October 14<sup>th</sup> by stating “we

rank 21<sup>st</sup> when it comes to math education. We rank 25<sup>th</sup> when it comes to science. We used to be number one in the proportion of college graduates. We now rank ninth” (Obama, 2010b).

The use of international statistics allows for Obama to reiterate again the call he made to the state educational officials and governors in 2009. He uses the statistics cited at the Youth Town Hall to suggest that “the most important thing [for education] we can do is to make sure that we’ve got very high standards, we expect a lot out of all of our young people, and we make sure that we have the best teachers possible in every classroom” (Obama, 2010b). These actions will help the United States in ascending in the international rankings, and should according to Obama (2010c) provide each student in the United States the chance to “receive a complete and competitive education from cradle to career.”

### **Education as the promise for jobs.**

While President Obama (2010a, 2010c, 2011) cited education as “an economic imperative” for the whole country to focus on, he also stated education was important for individual students. This importance for the individual is, not surprisingly, of economic importance. American youth, in the assumptions that can be made from Obama’s statements throughout the data, should think of education as a means of finding a job (2009b, 2009c, 2011). In 2009, to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Obama (2009b) linked early childhood programs to employment opportunities. He noted that “studies show that children in early childhood education programs are...more likely to hold a job, and more likely to earn more in that job.” At a speech to the NAACP in July of that same year he asserted that “a world-class education is a prerequisite for success” (Obama,

2009c). He concluded his development of education as a personal necessity for employment in March of 2011. To the students at TechBoston he stated “getting the best possible education has never been more important than it is right now. And that’s because in today’s world, a good job requires a good education” (Obama, 2011). The statements made in these speeches tied personal success in school to future employment success for each student (2009b, 2009c, 2011). Obama did not leave the need for employment success at the individual level however. Even in promoting education for individual purposes, he noted that “reforming education is the responsibility of every single American” as there is “no better economic policy” (Obama, 2011).

#### **Education as a tool for economic strength.**

Throughout these seven speeches, President Obama clearly connected education and the economy. He made note of the historical manners in which the advancement of education had led to American economic progress (Obama, 2009b; 2010b). He continually asserted that education is first and foremost an economic imperative and economic issue (Obama, 2010a; 2010b; 2011). He used education as a marker of international success, failure, security, and weakness (Obama, 2009a; 2009b; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2011). To justify this marker of international competition he used international assessments to conclude that for the most part American education is on the decline (Obama, 2009b; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c). And he used education as a way to promote employment opportunities for individuals as they move from schooling to their place in the American economy (Obama, 2009b; 2009c; 2011). The data seems to suggest that President Obama asserted to the nation a clear connection between the American economy and the American educational system.

### **The need for economic standards.**

By referencing international assessments as the benchmark for determining individual economic success and national economic superiority, President Obama also argued that standards will improve the scores on those international assessments. In March of 2009, Obama (2009b) stated “the solution to low test scores is not lowering standards – it’s tougher, clearer standards.” In his remarks to the National Urban League, in July of 2010, Obama’s call for the issuance of high standards came with international implications. In those remarks he claimed “nations in Asia and Europe have answered this question, in part by creating standards to make sure their teachers and students are performing at the same high levels throughout their nation” (Obama, 2010a). President Obama, in this speech, also remarked that a failure to create national standards arose because certain people claim national standards violate “the principle of local control” (Obama, 2010a). Obama failed to define exactly who criticizes national standards as violating local control, but suggests that rejection of national standards is at least partly responsible for American children faring worse in education than children from other countries (Obama, 2010a).

### **Race to the top as promoting higher standards.**

President Obama’s urging for national standards was often connected with espousals of an initiative from President Obama and his Department of Education entitled Race to the Top. Race to the Top was a grant that awarded money to states that advanced the adoption of national standards, measured student growth through data systems, and turned around low achieving schools (US Department of Education, 2009). Beginning in July of 2009, Obama made continual assertions of what Race to the Top meant to public

education within the United States. In the first iteration of Race to the Top in this data set he mentioned that Race to the Top “will reward states and public school districts that adopt 21<sup>st</sup> century standards and assessments” (Obama, 2009c). Obama (2009c) at this time, presented Race to the Top as “a challenge to America’s governors” and not necessarily as a challenge to schools or educators. He called for the governors to develop “an effective model for early learning,” including the development of standards for early learning programs; he called on governors to “demonstrate how you will prepare the lowest income children to meet the highest standards of success.”

Obama continued spreading awareness of Race to the Top in July of 2010 to the National Urban League. At this speech, Obama (2010a) explicitly claimed Race to the Top is “the single most important thing we’ve done.” In 2011, Obama concisely summarized and defined Race to the Top as “a challenge to states and school districts” to show the federal government that they’re “serious about reform.” This challenge would provide a competition between states and would stop money being poured into the “broken system” of public education. From July of 2010 to March of 2011, the President continually pointed out the benefits that states had seen as a result of the Race to the Top competition. To the National Urban League Obama (2010a) stated that Race to the Top had already “leveraged change at the state level.” This change from states concerning public education was especially powerful to Obama (2010a) because the Race to the Top criterion was set high and therefore “only a couple of states actually won the grant in the first round.” To Obama, this caused the states that were not awarded money from Race to the Top to strengthen and add on to their existing reform efforts for a chance to gain extra money.

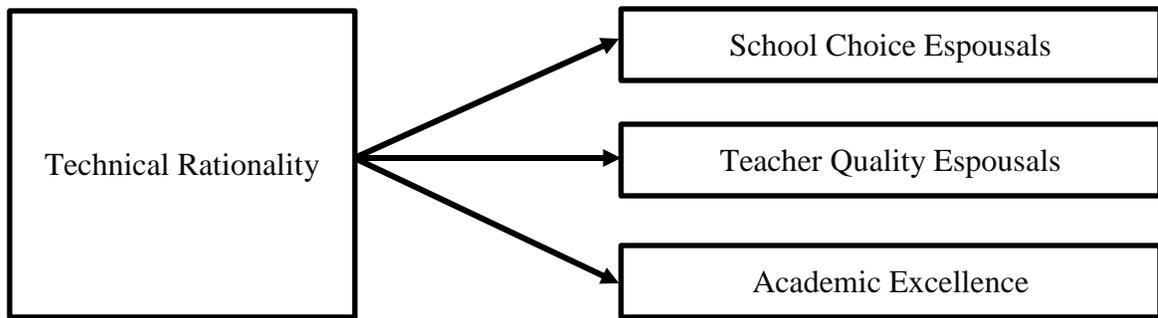
On October 14<sup>th</sup> of 2010, Obama furthered this idea that Race to the Top is powerful because of its incentivized nature, which served as a way to inspire reform. He stated that “if states want some additional money for [their] school, we’ll give it to [them]. But [they’ve] got to compete, show us that [they’re] going to reform [their] education system so that our children are performing better” (2010b). Five days later, Obama (2010c) stated that Race to the Top is “encouraging states to change their schools from the bottom up.” The use of encouragement, like the use of inspiration earlier, seemed to underplay the coercive effects of attaching money to educational change. In the final speech of this data set in March of 2011, Obama asserted the power of Race to the Top by stating, “for less than 1 percent of what America spends on education each year, Race to the Top has led over 40 states to raise their standards for teaching and learning.”

One of the pivotal components of Race to the Top incentives comes from encouraging states to adopt common standards. In 2010 Obama (2010a) suggested that national standards – because of the controversy surrounding local control – must not be imposed upon schools, but common standards must be “voluntarily” adopted by states. At that time, according to the President, “about 30 states [had] come together to embrace and develop common standards, high standards” (Obama, 2010a). The funding attached with Race to the Top provided the right incentives for states to raise standards and align with common national standards (Obama, 2010a). By October of 2010, instead of thirty states embracing and developing national standards, Obama (2010c) cites “48 states and D.C.” as competing “to raise standards.”

By the last speech in this data set, President Obama seemed to focus more on the success of Race to the Top. He first mentioned that Race to the Top led to common national standards being developed “at the grassroots level” (Obama, 2011). Obama supported this with a further utterance of what Race to the Top accomplished. In his mention that Race to the Top “led over 40 states to raise their standards for teaching and learning” he was sure to add on that those standards “were developed not in Washington but by Republican and Democratic governors all across the country” (Obama, 2011).

### **A Framework of Technical Rationality for Organizing Schools**

President Obama’s reliance on communicating education primarily as an economic interest allows others to understand education as an experience of technical rationality. Technical rationality as defined by Giroux (2001a) is built on the assumptions that all of education can be associated and tested through empirical assessments, and that all knowledge is value free and consists of facts which can be precisely defined. Technical rationality also relies on measures that relate educational progress only to “material and technical growth” and not to progress in the development of a more moral and just society or individual (Giroux, 1997, p. 8). By framing education through the lens of technical rationality, President Obama may allow for the continued control and dominance of the status quo.



**Figure 2.** The organizational components of public education policy as are necessary because of technical rationality framing of schools

Technical rationality in education helps to create and maintain the status quo which historically and presently benefits whites and under privileges racial minorities. Hodkinson (1997) asserts that technical rationality in educational contexts “marginalize deep-rooted social factors influencing educational achievement and underachievement, such as social class, ethnicity, and gender” (p. 79). Standaert (1993) also finds that because of one of the main tenets of technical rationality being “economic liberalism,” schools in a technical rationality framework emphasize “individual achievement, competition, and the free market” (p. 160). The assertions by Hodkinson (1997) and Standaert (1993) convey an understanding that models of technical rationality in education are not concerned with the past and current inequities within education, but only with the strength of the individual to achieve. Technical rationality in education, therefore, upholds a meritocracy that will compare students and schools, make those students and schools compete, and promote the winners to be valued more (Standaert, 1993, p. 161).

President Obama, in regurgitating the polemics of technical rationality, also guarantees that citizens will continue to think of school organization in arenas compatible with technical rationality. As President Obama continues to convey schools as economic enterprises and training grounds, schools continue to be shaped as the modern work

organization. The ubiquity of technical rationality within work organizations only serves to justify that schools be structured in the same way (Adams & Ingersoll, 1990).

Businesses and corporations, often created and organized in the mode of technical rationality, constantly work towards economic progress that is measurable and clear.

Schools which are modeled after the same technical rationality organizational structures must work towards those same measurable and clear indicators of progress. For schools this means that there will be quality indicators of achievement and success which are measurable, quantifiable, and clear (Standaert, 1993, p. 162). It is not solely the quantifiable, measurable, and clear indicators of success that schools are burdened with when constructed in the mold of technical rationality, it is also how evaluation of schools, students, and teachers occurs. Hodkinson (1997) explains that in an approach of technical rationality, assessments are used and continuously refined to evaluate and manage people and processes (p. 74).

Schools, through technical rationality, are forced to imitate the organizational structure of industries and corporations. They are forced to develop indicators that are quantifiable in nature, that provide measurable outcomes, and that show clear signs of achievement, success, and failure. These indicators are then continuously used to evaluate teachers, students, and schools and to use those evaluations and assessments as managerial tools. In the organization of technical rationality, any school not meeting the indicators is not successful, any school not meeting economic growth is not serving the purpose of the United States, or more importantly, the economy.

President Obama's framing of education as an economic imperative commits education to a technical rationality framework. In so doing, it also constructs the other

manners in which he discusses how schools and education should be organized. President Obama uses school choice, teacher quality, and academic excellence as constructs into developing a more perfect educational system within the United States. A system that will better serve the economy and will provide more economic growth, a more competitive workforce, and more clear standards of achievement and success. Technical rationality is apparent in school choice protestations because of the reliance on a “competitive system of selection” which are determined by “market principles and unlimited right of choice” (Standaert, 1993, p. 161). It is apparent in teacher quality assertions by using assessments and evaluations as forms of external managerial control which determine pay, expertise, and competency (Standaert, 1993, p. 171). Finally, technical rationality is most apparent in the pursuit of academic excellence. The commitment to technical rationality guarantees that students will be measured on their performance and their achievement rates, as will schools. It also guarantees, therefore, that schools will not be judged on their commitment to ethics or equality. Education will not be judged on the social responsibility aspects and abilities it creates within students, because those cannot be measured nor quantified (Adams & Balfour, 2010). Instead, the government, by aligning with technical rationality, does not take the opportunity increase social justice or decrease racism. That is secondary. That moral imperative does not need to be of primary importance. Primary importance is of the efficiency of the market, the efficiency of school, the achievement of students, and the economic growth that schools should provide for the future of the United States.

## **School Choice Espousals through the Speeches**

Throughout the educational speeches studied in this research, President Obama (2009c; 2010a; 2011) seemed to assert that charter schools provide benefits to the American educational system. These assertions align directly to the dependence of technical rationality on quantifiable outcomes that can determine whether an object or instrument produces a positive result. In this case the instrument is a school and the result is academic excellence. President Obama's support of charter schools seems to suggest that through increasing competition and turning schools into markets to produce better outputs, there will be more academic excellence throughout the country.

In 2009, to the NAACP President Obama (2009c) almost masked his appeal for charter schools by bringing up "innovative approaches" that were "challenging students to complete high school and earn a free associate's degree or college credit in just four years." To support this claim he addressed the work of two schools in New York City – Bard High School Early College and Medgar Evers College Preparatory School. Both of these schools rely on selective admissions processes, which goes unmentioned in the President's remarks.

A year later, president Obama supported charter schools again, this time to the National Urban League. In speaking of what should happen to schools that shut down after failing accountability standards, Obama (2010a) suggested "restarting the school under different management as a charter school" which will be "formed by parents, teachers, and civic leaders who've got broad leeway to innovate." Following this, President Obama (2010a) made it very clear of his support by stating, "I don't support all charter schools, but I do support good charter schools." In much the same way as he did

with remarks at the NAACP, he supported his remarks concerning charter schools at this speech by promoting certain charter schools – this time in Philadelphia. He noted that Mastery Charter School in Philadelphia has increased “reading and math levels nearly double – in some cases, triple” (Obama, 2010a). He also noted that another campus in the Mastery program “called Pickett went from just 14 percent of students being proficient in math to almost 70 percent” (Obama, 2010a).

The same formulation and espousals of the success of charter schools came in March 2011 when President Obama addressed TechBoston Academy. TechBoston like Medgar Evers College Preparatory, Bard High School Early College, and the Mastery Schools in Philadelphia is also a selective admissions campus. At TechBoston, Obama (2011) stated that he “wanted to come to TechBoston so that the rest of America can see how it’s done” and that the school was “a model for what’s happening all across the country.” For Obama (2011), the achievement levels at TechBoston proved that “every child can succeed. And every child deserves that chance.” Only after this statement, and for the first time in any of the speeches, does Obama bring up the issue of selective admissions. He stated that “we can’t forget that every year, schools like TechBoston have to hold a lottery, because there just aren’t enough spaces for all the students who want to go here” (Obama, 2011).

Only after delivering speeches espousing the benefits of charter schools in helping students achieve, with each school brought forward in the statements operating under selective admissions processes, did Obama bring up any downfalls of charter schools. And those downfalls concerned the selective admissions processes and how “schools like TechBoston have to hold a lottery, because there just aren’t enough spaces for all the

students who want to go here” (Obama, 2011). He explicitly noted how “that can’t be the system of education we settle for in America. No child’s chance in life should be determined by the luck of a lottery (Obama, 2011). Yet, the qualms of lotteries and of how some children are not given the best chance in life are largely glazed over. Instead of calling for any widespread changes to the public education system, he instead harkened back to TechBoston being “a place where everyone gets the chance to succeed” (Obama, 2011).

Bard High School Early College, Mastery Schools in Philadelphia, Medgar Evers College Preparatory School, and TechBoston were five of the six schools specifically mentioned by Obama in this data set (2009c; 2010a, 2011). The only other school mentioned in this data was Village Academy in Pomona, California. Village Academy, interestingly enough, is the only school out of the six not to be a charter school. This fact should not be left unstated. President Obama (2009a; 2009c; 2010a; 2010c), while defining public education as a failure and schools as failing, offered up examples of successful schools which were predominantly charter schools. Such iterations could help audiences to believe that charter schools provided the best opportunity for success, and that traditional public schools were still failing. The President in his assertions for the success of these schools also relied strictly on achievement data to support his claims. Both of these factors could greatly impact the audience’s understanding of education and the role charter schools should play within American education.

### **Teacher Quality Espousals through the Speeches**

President Obama (2009b; 2009c; 2010a; 2010b; 2011) when talking of teacher quality within the United States cited the importance of teachers, the need for

improvement, and the need for rewarding and recognizing good teaching – all three of which correlate with the value of technical and quantifiable growth that is evident in any organizational structure built on technical rationality. The importance of teachers in this speech came in three different speeches: the March of 2009 speech to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the July 2010 speech to the National Urban League, and through remarks at the October 2010 BET Youth Town Hall. To the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Obama (2009b) claimed “the job of a teacher is too important for us to accept anything less than the best.” He followed that claim up with an assertion to the National Urban League stating “teachers are the single most important factor in a child’s education from the moment they step into the classroom” (Obama, 2010a). Finally, at the Youth Town Hall, Obama summed up the importance of teaching by suggesting that teachers must be knowledgeable experts in their content, and that teachers should also “know how to inspire and engage young people.”

Concerning improving teacher quality throughout education, President Obama provided comments in two speeches: July of 2010 to the National Urban League and March of 2011 at TechBoston Academy. His first espousal of how teachers can improve was initiated by complimenting changes that states and teachers union made in order to compete for Race to the Top funds. Obama (2010a) celebrated innovative ideas such as setting “aside 90 minutes of collaboration time a week” that would not only “improve instruction, but” would also “strengthen teacher development and evaluation.” In 2011 at TechBoston, Obama reiterated the need for strengthening teacher development. He stated that his administration was “working to give educators the support and the preparation that they need” in order to be successful. Such actions and the development of programs

for increasing teacher quality are needed as stated by Obama (2011) because, America has “to stop making excuses for bad teachers” and has “got to reward good teachers.”

The President mentioned such rewarding and recognition of teachers on two different occasions besides the 2011 speech. Rewarding teachers first becomes evident in March of 2009 in remarks Obama made to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. He mentioned at this speech that “too many supporters of my party have resisted the idea of rewarding excellence in teaching with extra pay, even though we know it can make a difference in the classroom” (Obama, 2009b). This is connected to a bigger statement that the “same stale debates that have paralyzed progress and perpetuated our educational decline” are keeping teachers from being rewarded with extra pay (Obama, 2009b). In 2010, in a speech to the National Urban League, President Obama suggested that rewarding teachers is part of a measure of accountability. To Obama (2010a) it is necessary to “make sure we’re seeing results in the classroom.” For Obama, rewarding teachers is a necessary component to ensuring teacher quality (2011). And if that teacher is not strong enough to be rewarded, then there should be clear ways to improve teaching, and if measures do not show success, that teacher should be labeled as “bad” and no longer able to teach (Obama, 2011).

### **Academic Excellence in Obama’s Words**

#### *Interpretations of school success and school failure.*

In four of the speeches in this data set, President Obama (2009a; 2009c; 2010a; 2010c) seemed to suggest that education and schools are a failing enterprise within the United States. He relies on technical rationality to determine this, by focusing on quantifiable test scores and measures of quality across public schools. The first such

iteration came at his inaugural address when he asserted plainly “our schools fail too many” (Obama, 2009a). He followed that assertion with a statement in July of 2009 suggesting that “if Al Sharpton, Mike Bloomberg, and Newt Gingrich can agree that we need to solve the education problem, then that’s something all of American can agree we can solve” (Obama, 2009c). A year later, addressing the National Urban League, Obama (2010a) once again elicited evocations of school failure by citing the numerous “young people who’ve been relegated to failing schools in struggling communities, where there are too many obstacles, too few role models.”

To Obama, fixing the ‘failing schools’ and increasing school success, as extrapolated earlier in this chapter, required new standards, innovative approaches such as charter schools, and quality teachers. By the last speech in 2010, President Obama suggested there was an air of cynicism holding back such efforts. His statements on October 19<sup>th</sup> called out opposition to reform movements. Obama (2010c) started off this thought by stating “I know there will be cynics out there who say that this improvement that we’re seeking is not possible; that the reforms won’t work; the problems in our education system are too entrenched.” He countered such cynical opposition by stating that as President, he “will not give in to calls to shortchange any of our students” (Obama, 2010c). In effect, President Obama here equated cynics of current educational reform movements with the shortchanging of children in the United States. For President Obama (2010c), there were identifiable ways to increase school success, and any questioning of such methods is undesirable and holding back progress.

*Responsibility for the failure of schools.*

For President Obama's contention that local control is preventing advancement and progress in United States education (2009b; 2010a), he often asserted that immediate influences such as states, cities, districts, parents, and students themselves are the most responsible for assertions of educational failure (2009b; 2010a; 2010c; 2011). To the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Obama insinuated that districts, cities, and parents were culpable in students not meeting the educational expectations of the federal government. First, he suggested that a district's failure to use tracking system can lead to student failure and that "far too few districts are emulating the example of Houston and Long Beach, and using data to track how much progress a student is making and where that student is struggling" (Obama, 2009b). He then correlated certain cities with dropout rates and stated that "high schools in cities like Detroit and Los Angeles and Philadelphia produce over 50 percent of America's dropouts" (Obama, 2009b). After leveling concerns at districts and cities for their roles in the supposed educational problems of the United States, Obama (2009b) also discussed the roles and responsibilities of parents. He stated that "no government policy will make any difference unless we also hold ourselves more accountable as parents – because government no matter how wise or efficient, cannot turn off the TV or put away the video games." Throughout the speech to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Obama suggested responsibility over the failing of American schools is at the feet of districts, cities, and parents.

President Obama continued this thought process of parents, districts, and cities needing to do more throughout 2010 in remarks to the National Urban League and at the signing of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans

(2010a; 2010c). To the National Urban League he focused his comments on the responsibility of parents and the responsibility of students themselves. Obama (2010a) issued an assertion first that “parents are going to have to get more involved in their children’s education.” He then stated that “it’s not just parents. It’s the children too. Our kids need to understand nobody is going to hand them a future” (Obama, 2010a). Speaking directly to children, Obama (2010b) proclaimed “an education is not something you just tip your head and they pour it in your ear. You’ve got to want it. You’ve got to reach out and claim that future for yourself. And you can’t make excuses.” As he moved into October of 2010, President Obama (2010c) again asserted that the onus is on cities and districts to turn around schools, and also reminded the audience that the “5,000 worst schools” in America belong to certain communities and “produce the most Latino and African-American dropouts.”

### **The Educational Philosophy of President Obama**

The educational philosophy that President Obama communicated through the selected data is shaped significantly by the economy. There is generous evidence to support the notion that his statements concerning education as an economic venture led to assertions for organizational strategies that structure schools in certain ways. These strategies call for school choice as necessary, teacher quality as essential and individual responsibility for academic excellence. All three are supported through a technical rationality philosophy that means schools can be measured, learning can be objectified, and children can become outputs. Such technical rationality and the organization of schools created under that technical rationality allows for the communication of neoliberalism throughout education.

Obama first and foremost communicated this neoliberal educational philosophy through his stance tying education and the economy together (Obama, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2011). He did this through noting the investments the government has historically made in public education (Obama, 2009b; 2010b). He also suggested that education was most important for the economic well-being of the United States (Obama, 2010a; 2010b; 2011). At times, President Obama (2009b; 2010b; 2010c; 2011) also suggested that education is the best way to stay superior to other nations that the United States is in constant competition against. President Obama (2009b; 2009c; 2011) also conveyed that education is the decider in what occupation an individual will find and international assessments are the determinant of the success or failure of students or schools. Finally, the consistent espousal of Race to the Top readily showcased Obama's entrenched neoliberal philosophy of education (Obama, 2009c; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2011). By making states compete, by withholding money to incentivize performance, and therefore by making educational funding unequal, Obama with Race to the Top cemented his identity as educationally neoliberal.

To provide further evidence of his neoliberal education philosophy, President Obama also consistently invoked ideas of school choice (2009c; 2010a; 2011), teacher quality (2009b; 2009c; 2010a; 2010b; 2011), and academic excellence (2009a; 2009c; 2010a; 2010c) – all of which are core components of neoliberalism in education. Unlike his calls to the nation that his administration was making sweeping changes that may take years to pay off (Obama, 2010c), the educational philosophy he consistently promoted to the audience only serves to reinforce the neoliberal efforts of the previous four Presidents.

In his support of school choice, President Obama carried forward the work of President George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush in bringing school choice to United States educational policy. In fact, Obama's invocations of community innovation through charter schools is eerily reminiscent of George H.W. Bush's (1991) claim that "educational choice is one of the most important tools that communities can embrace in their pursuit of educational improvement" (p. 295). By using school choice as a determinant of Race to the Top, President Obama also seemed to build upon George W. Bush's policy ploy of covertly implementing school choice principles into educational policy (Saltman, 2007). Like George W. Bush's belief that charter schools may be able to "reconstitute failing schools" and make them successful (Henig, 2009, p. 289), President Obama (2010a) opined that school choice may be able to help a community turn a failing school into a successful school.

President Obama's statements concerning teacher quality also mirrored the statements made in promotions of neoliberal beliefs in educational policy. President Obama clearly followed the ideas of *A Nation at Risk* in his stance on rewarding teachers who meet performance criteria with more pay. *A Nation at Risk* stated a need to "recognize outstanding performance" (Goldberg, 1984, p. 15). Likewise, seventeen years later, President Obama (2009b) reiterated the stance of *A Nation at Risk* and promoted the idea of "rewarding excellence in teaching with extra pay." Obama's assertions that teacher quality and performance could be measured also elicit reminders of earlier efforts to quantify a teacher's abilities through the policies of his presidential predecessors. As Eppley (2009) notes, the "external standard of proficiency" can never fully take into account what is happening within the walls of a school (p. 3). Obama's desire for one

standard of teacher quality and proficiency is unlikely to be accurate and will only continue misidentification of quality teaching.

President Obama also continued to promote the idea upon the nation that America's schools are failing. This has been a dominant trope by Presidents since the release of *A Nation at Risk*. Like his predecessors, Obama communicated achievement on assessments to be the indicator of quality within the educational system. Like his predecessors, Obama also failed to consistently look beyond achievement criterion. While he did seem to assert a couple of moments of promoting academic progress over academic achievement (2009b), Obama when talking of international competition, when labeling schools as failures through current measures, and when discussing the achievement gap relies on data that is achievement based in nature. Coalescing this view, with his stance regarding the connection of education and the economy, the merits of school choice, and the need for assessing teacher quality, gives a clear indication that President Obama perpetuates a neoliberal philosophy to audiences throughout speeches and statements concerning education.

## **Question 2: Aspects of Race as Communicated to the Audience**

*“But make no mistake: The pain of discrimination is still felt in America. (Applause.) By African American women paid less for doing the same work as colleagues of a different color and a different gender. (Laughter.) By Latinos made to feel unwelcome in their own country. (Applause.) By Muslim Americans viewed with suspicion simply because they kneel down to pray to their God. (Applause.) By our gay brothers and sisters, still taunted, still attacked, still denied their rights. (Applause.)”*

*President Barack Obama – July 17, 2009*

The quote above, offered up in President Obama's remarks to the NAACP on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009, seems to best indicate how Barack Obama in his role as President approaches race. It is not so much what he says, as what he fails to say which is of most importance. President Obama, consistently throughout mentions of race, and exemplified through this quote relied on passiveness, made certain populations invisible, and left absent any reminders of the government responsibility in ongoing discrimination and racism experienced within the United States of America.

The very first part of this statement – “the pain of discrimination is still felt in America” – conveys a commitment to glossing over the subjects that have dominated, discriminated, and oppressed the many various minorities within America. Obama, in utilizing a passive construction, by never even mentioning the actors that have perpetuated pain on others, allows the actors to slip away from their actions. President Obama showed strength in mentioning that discrimination is still ongoing within America. But there is more of a weakness in how he portrayed how that problem is still experienced. He focused on the victims and not on the aggressors. He focused on how discrimination is experienced and not how the government or society can end such discrimination. “The pain of discrimination is felt” allowed for audiences to be free of thinking further of the actors and aggressors of that discrimination. President Obama could have stated, whites have caused the pain of discrimination, or the government has caused the pain of discrimination to be felt, or men have caused the pain of discrimination to be felt, or fundamental Christians. Any of these could have been mentioned, and would have been arguably factual.

Yet the action of that the statement, the verb phrase of “is felt” placed the focus of the whole statement on the victims. In not naming those responsible for the propagation of discrimination, President Obama made the act of discrimination – whether it be based on race, gender, sexuality, or religion – solely visible to the victims of that discrimination. When one thinks of other crimes, other arenas in which there are victims, the suspects and aggressors are always prominently featured. Through talking of discrimination in a way that only mentioned how it is experienced victims, President Obama left aggressors of discrimination free of obligation. In turn, there was no responsibility for admitting to the actions, no responsibility for changing the course of their actions, no responsibility to reconcile the pain they have caused others.

President Obama also provided a collection of groups of people that have experienced discrimination. Among these he talked of Black working women, Latinos, Muslims, and gay Americans. When thinking of such groups, it is virtually impossible and incomprehensible to believe that they have never been discriminated against – they have, and that discrimination continues to occur in both malicious and invisible methods. I do not intend to suggest that the discrimination felt by those groups is not important to call out, because it is. Yet, there are also groups that Obama failed to bring into the discussion. The most interesting omission from the listing of victims who still experience the pain of discrimination is the omission of Black men. Above all, this is the group that still experiences the most consistent and widespread discriminatory acts. And yet, President Obama did not include them in the assertion that the pain of discrimination is still felt in America. He glossed over the discrepancies in prison population that adversely affects Black males. He made no mention of racial profiling which targets Black males.

He left silent the negative experiences of young Black men in school. The question is why he left Black men invisible.

At a time where President Obama highlighted discrimination and the pain that it still causes within America, his omission of Black men from that group may suggest that they do not experience that pain. This could be political in nature. For the same reason President Obama left the aggressors invisible, he could have left Black men invisible. In leaving aggressors invisible, President Obama alleviates possible criticism from bigoted and prejudiced individuals and organizations that could capitalize off of perverting his words. In leaving Black men invisible, President Obama could achieve much the same. It is more politically efficient and effective for Obama to neither address Black men or the instigators of discrimination. However, a failure to communicate the sides of this duality leaves audiences with an unawareness of the true instigators of discrimination or a whole group of victims. It leaves audiences with the ability to not think of the true actors and some of the most betrayed victims. It leaves audiences with understanding the status quo.

The third way in which this quote exemplifies the overall comments of race by President Barack Obama is in the promotion of individuals as the actors of racism, and not governmental or societal institutions. In his listing of the discrimination felt by the victims, he mentioned the views of suspicion, he mentioned that some groups were made to feel unwelcome, that some groups were taunted, attacked, and denied their rights. All of these suggest, or at least allude to the idea, that discrimination is mostly through the actions of individuals. It is individual persons who glance and glare. It is individual persons who attack and taunt. It is individual persons who look at others with suspicion. The absence of any mentions of institutionalized racism is not mentioned. It is not

suggested that Muslims are actively profiled by enforcement agencies because of their race. It is not suggested that gay Americans are denied rights by the government and/or state laws. It is not suggested that laws and acts through state and federal authorities seek to limit the influx of Latinos into the United States. Instead, President Obama allowed the audience to continue thoughts of discrimination as individual actions and not institutional actions. This again allowed for the preservation of the status quo within American society.

Through this one quote, President Obama's views concerning race come into sharp focus. He consistently allows whites and others who are bigoted free of burden for their discriminatory transgressions either past or present. He consistently downplays the role of race within discrimination, especially concerning Black men. And he consistently speaks of discrimination as individual in nature, and not as a force that is institutional first and foremost. These same approaches are evidenced throughout his comments concerning race in the speeches studied.

### **Race and Social Positions**

President Obama (2009c; 2010b; 2010c) only mentioned the inequitable conditions that Blacks and Latinos face in three of the speeches in this data set. When he spoke of the social position of Blacks and Latinos in comparison to whites he did so in three ways. First, he spoke of the myriad ways that discrimination still impacts Blacks and Latinos (Obama, 2009c). Secondly, President Obama (2009c) argued that personal responsibility is of absolute importance in overcoming barriers that racial minorities face. Finally, in these speeches Obama (2009c; 2010b; 2010c) focused on the inequity that racial minority students feel in schools and classrooms.

In the speech to the NAACP in July of 2009, President Obama (2009c) spoke far more in depth concerning discrimination than in any of the other speeches in this data set. At the culmination, Obama (2009c) stated plainly “the pain of discrimination is still felt in America.” He preceded that statement with representations of health care and the fact that “African Americans are more likely to suffer from a host of diseases but less likely to own health insurance than just about anybody else. He also preceded the claim of “the pain of discrimination is still felt in America” by stating that “an African American child is roughly five times as likely as a white child to see the inside of a prison” (Obama, 2009c). After claiming that “the pain of discrimination is still felt in America” Obama (2009c) outlined further discrimination ongoing within the American society. First he stated it is felt “by African American women [being] paid less for doing the same work as colleagues of a different color and a different gender” (Obama, 2009c). Next he asserted that “the pain of discrimination is still felt “by Latinos made to feel unwelcome in their own country” (Obama, 2009c). Then Obama (2009c) stated that discrimination is still felt religiously “by Muslim Americans viewed with suspicion simply because they kneel down to pray to their God.” Finally, he talked of sexual orientation discrimination in asserting that “discrimination is still felt...by our gay brothers and sisters, still taunted, still attacked, still denied their rights” (Obama, 2009c). This speech, in July of 2009, was the only speech within this data in which President Obama directly and clearly spoke about the groups marginalized by discrimination, and how discrimination was felt throughout the country.

He also took many efforts within this speech to the NAACP to promote the personal responsibility that comes along with overcoming discrimination (Obama,

2009c). While President Obama (2009c) was quick to point out the “pain of discrimination,” he also posited that some of the ‘pain’ was self-inflicted. During the speech, Obama (2009c) noted that “one of the most durable and destructive legacies of discrimination is the way we’ve internalized a sense of limitation; how so many in our community have come to expect so little from the world and from themselves.” President Obama (2009c) furthered this internalization of supposed low expectations in a later call during the same speech for Black parents to not “feed our children with a sense of --- that somehow because of their race that they cannot achieve.” Obama (2009c) suggested that individual responsibility and determinism is the best way to battle the “discrimination still felt.” To Obama, such responsibility and determinism, is most essential to Blacks inside of American schools. Obama (2009c) told the members of the NAACP to accept the fact that “the odds of growing up amid crimes and gangs are higher” for Black students. He also posited that economic inequality and the challenges that accompany it also will be faced by Black students (Obama, 2009c). Neither of these factors are “a reason to get bad grades...not a reason to cut class...not a reason to give up on your education and drop out of school” (Obama, 2009c). Obama (2009c) with this statement, seemed to suggest that the supposed educational problems of Black students are from truancy, from getting low grades, and from eventually dropping out of school. As a counterweight to such individual missteps, Obama (2009c) suggested a “no excuses” approach as necessary to teach Black students. In his utterances, education for Black students is a matter of persistence and perseverance. He stated that Black students will be made “stronger” by “all those hardships” that they have to endure, which will make Black students “better able to compete” (Obama, 2009c).

The role of the individual in overcoming hardships to meet capabilities and responsibilities concerning education is also evident in remarks President Obama made in October of 2010 to the BET Youth Town Hall (2010b) and at the signing of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (2010c). In 2009, to the NAACP, Obama (2009c) was sure to point out that “African American students are lagging behind white classmates in reading and math” and that “over half of all African American students are dropping out of school in some places.”

Only in two other speeches did President Obama take the same effort to point out racial discrepancies in current definitions of academic success. These came in October of 2010 – first at the BET Youth Town Hall (2010b) and then at the signing of the Executive Order on the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (2010c). At the BET Youth Town Hall, President Obama (2010b) once again turned his focus towards educational downfalls of Black students, this time specifically Black boys. He stated to the Youth Town Hall that “African American boys oftentimes fall behind in school early, start feeling discouraged, check out, drop out, end up on the streets and then get into trouble” (Obama, 2010b). Five days later at the signing of an executive order supporting the educational excellence of Hispanic Americans, Obama (2010c) specifically focused on the educational challenges that accompany being a Latino in today’s society. Obama (2010c) stated that “Latinos make up the largest minority group in America’s schools...and they face challenges of monumental proportions.” Some of those challenges that Obama (2010c) brought to the forefront during this speech are that “Latino students are more likely to attend out lowest performing schools” and “more likely to learn in larger class sizes.” Obama (2010c) also suggested that Latinos

are “more likely to drop out at higher rates” and that “fewer than half take part in early childhood education” while also stating that “only about half graduate on time from high school.” Obama (2010c) also indirectly placed some culpability on Latinos for the fact that “America has fallen from first to ninth in college completion rates for all our students” because Latinos “who do make it to college often find themselves underprepared for its rigors.”

### **Racial Progress**

While President Obama discussed discrimination solely in July of 2009, he immediately started talking of the racial progress that has occurred in the United States. While addressing racial progress during his Inauguration in January of 2009 (2009a), Obama (2009c; 2010b) also limited his discussion of race to only a few speeches in this data set. President Obama (2009a) first brought up racial progress through a personal narrative in his Inaugural Address. As he addressed the nation, on the historic occasion of the first Black man to be taking the Oath of Office as President, Obama (2009a) marked it in stating that his experience as “a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served in a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath” as the “meaning of our liberty and our creed.” Obama (2009a) then embarked onto how Americans “cannot help but believe that the old [racial] hatreds shall someday pass.” To Obama (2009a), during this speech, America had progressed because “we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united.” The further cultivation of unity, and the further strength that is to come from working together should serve to rid the United States of “old [racial] hatreds” (Obama, 2009a).

Later in 2009, at his speech to the NAACP, President Obama (2009c) again marked racial progress through historical affirmations. He focused on how the efforts of individuals have changed society and made it more racially just. First, he suggested that there was a linkage between the founding fathers of the United States and “the civil rights giants” of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in that both “understood how change would come” (Obama, 2009c). To get to a more just society, the knowledge of the founders and of civil rights leaders was premised on the idea “that unjust laws needed to be overturned; that legislation needed to be passed; and that Presidents needed to be pressured into action” (Obama, 2009c). To support this notion, Obama (2009c) stated that the overturning of Jim Crow laws and the passage of civil rights legislation led to “Black CEOs today run[ning] Fortune 500 companies” and “Black mayors, governors, and members of Congress served in places where they might have been able not just to vote but even take a sip of water.” President Obama (2009c) as in his statements of individuals being responsible for overcoming the discrimination they face, also once again talked of individuals being the catalyst for the racial progress that led to his own ability to become the first Black President. He stated, “because ordinary people did such extraordinary things, because they made the civil rights movement their own... [I] began the journey that has led me to be here tonight as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America” (Obama, 2009c).

President Obama (2009c), in his remarks to the NAACP, also took the opportunity to suggest that there is still work to be done concerning racial progress. He cited that “there may be a temptation among some to think that discrimination is no longer a problem.” As mentioned earlier, he provided clear indications that “the pain of

discrimination is still felt.” It was not until almost a year and a half later, in his statements at the BET Youth Town Hall where President Obama spoke more about how racial progress interplays within American society (2010b). Obama (2010c), in speaking of the evolution of America concerning race and racial equality suggested that “typically we make progress on race relations in fits and starts. We make some progress, and then there’s maybe some slippage.” Obama (2010b) then suggested that racial “misunderstandings and antagonism surfaces most strongly when economic times are tough” and racial antagonists are engendered “around kind of a tribal attitude, and issues of race become more prominent.” In suggesting that issues of race become more prominent during economic troubles, Obama (2010b) elicited the idea that when the economy is strong, racial issues are not pressing and not even that apparent.

### **Roles of Different Parts of Society**

President Obama, throughout his statements in this set of data, also imparted on his audiences remarks concerning the responsibilities and roles of different parts of society. In his speech to the NAACP in July of 2009, Obama (2009c) offered up the responsibilities of government in creating programs and overseeing change. Yet this was the only speech in which his remarks focused on this area. Conversely, in three speeches, Obama (2009a; 2009c; 2010c) remarked on the importance and responsibility of individuals in overcoming racial discrimination.

#### **Government and government programs.**

When discussing the role of government in overcoming racial discrimination, President Obama’s comments are limited to one speech – to the NAACP in July of 2009. He stated to the audience explicitly that “government must be a force for opportunity.

Yes, government must be a force for equality” (Obama, 2009c). As part of government’s role in being “a force for equality,” Obama (2009c) also espoused how certain bureaucratic measures and programs were being constructed and supported to combat the “structural inequalities that our nation’s legacy of discrimination has left behind.” First he mentioned the “White House Office on Urban Affairs” as leading the charge in “targeting” the structural barriers currently in the way of equality and opportunity (Obama, 2009c). Next, he moved on to programs that his administration and the federal government were supporting that could “foster a comprehensive approach to ending poverty” and specifically mentioned building upon “Geoffrey Canada’s success with the Harlem Children’s Zone” and using that structure to create more “Promise Neighborhoods” (Obama, 2009c). These neighborhoods, like the Harlem Children’s Zone, would serve to end “poverty by putting all children on a pathway to college, and [give] them the schooling and after-school support that they need to get there.”

From that moment, Obama (2009c) moved more into how universal laws and orders would serve to also end discrimination and structural inequalities. He asserted that the enactment of such laws would create long-term strength and stability not for one group of people, but for “all Americans. Of every race. Of every creed. From every region of the country” (Obama, 2009c). Universal actions and legislation to benefit all citizens is necessary he stated because “we want everyone to be able to participate in the American Dream” (Obama, 2009c). The universal initiatives Obama (2009c) proposed would help alleviate structural inequalities based on racial discrimination are making “quality health coverage affordable for all,” “energy reform” which allows for the creation of “jobs that can’t be outsourced,” and “financial reform with consumer

protections...to stop predatory lenders from targeting Black and Latino communities all across the country.” President Obama (2009c) stated soon after this list of policies, laws, and initiatives, that “these are some of the ways we’re doing our part in government to overcome the inequities, the injustices, the barriers that still exist in our country.” Obama was also quick to point out that although “government programs,” reforms, and laws could be put in place to alleviate structural barriers based upon generations worth of discrimination. He announced that “government programs alone won’t get our children to the Promised Land. We need a new mind set, a new set of attitudes” (Obama, 2009c).

### **Individuals.**

President Obama, when discussing racial discrimination and the path to achieving equity within America, consistently alluded to the role of individuals in shaping racial equality and overcoming generations of barriers (Obama, 2009a; 2009c; 2010b; 2010c). Unlike explicit statements in phrases about the roles and responsibilities of the government, the purpose of education, etc., Obama was more subtle and vague about the role of individualism in overcoming racial discrimination. At his Inauguration, President Obama (2009a) stated to the audience that “the time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit...that noble idea passed on from generation to generation.” To Obama (2009a) that “noble idea” is “the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.” Later this suggestion of a “noble idea” that has “passed on from generation to generation” has done so through the work of individuals. Obama (2009a) stated individuals “packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life.” Individuals “toiled in sweatshops, and settled the West.” Individuals “endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth.”

Individuals “fought and died in places like Concord and Gettysburg, Normandy and Khe Sahn” (Obama, 2009a). Such analogies made it seem as if the works of individuals have been what has made the United States into its current form.

Obama (2009c; 2010c) continued this promulgation of the importance of the individual in the United States in remarks to the NAACP, at the Youth Town Hall sponsored by Black Entertainment Television, and at the signing of the Educational Excellence for Hispanic American Initiative. To the NAACP, President Obama (2009c) stated that while educational policies could empower Black students, and programs could help Black students overcome generations of discouragement, that it was still ultimately up to individuals. He stated “even if we do all that” referring to governmental programs and reforms, “the African American community will still fall behind...unless we do a far better job than we have been doing of educating our sons and daughters.” Despite earlier assertions of structural inequalities earlier in the same speech, Obama (2009c) suggested that the most important part in overcoming any educational discrepancy between Black students and their white counterparts is up to individuals and how they personally educate their children. He made a similar statement in October of 2010 at the signing of the Executive Order for the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. Obama (2010c) in his remarks stated that “while strengthening Hispanic education in America is the purpose of this initiative, it’s not something that can fall on the Department of Education [or government] alone.” Instead, just as Black parents are ultimately responsible for educating their children in order to alleviate discrimination and structural inequality, Latino and Hispanic parents – with help from individuals in the

public and private sector, and educators - are going to need to “get involved in their kids’ education” (Obama, 2010c).

### **Education and Race in Society**

In the speeches studied, President Obama (2009b; 2009c; 2010a; 2010c) suggested that education and achieving racial equity go hand in hand. He first mentioned the correlation between education and race in statements to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in March of 2009. To the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Obama (2009b) stated “it’s that most American of ideas, that with the right education, a child of any race, any faith, any station, can overcome whatever barriers stand in their way and fulfill their God-given potential.” In July of 2009, in a speech to the NAACP he reiterated this call. Obama (2009c) stated that “there’s a reason the story of the civil rights movement was written in our schools.” He then supported this by promoting the historical figures of Thurgood Marshall, Linda Brown, and the Little Rock Nine. The reason Obama (2009c) gave for the civil rights movement being written in schools was “because there is no stronger weapon against inequality and a better path to opportunity than an education that can unlock a child’s God-given potential.” In these deliveries, he seemed to pass a message on to the audience that the schooling that a child receives will help them overcome “structural barriers” of discrimination and inequity (Obama, 2009b; 2009c).

In later speeches and remarks concerning race, President Obama’s (2009a) yearning for each American to be armed “with the right education” that will enable them to “overcome whatever barriers stand in their way” became almost secondary as to other purposes of education. To the NAACP, President Obama (2009c) posited that “the state of our schools is not an African American problem; it is an American problem.” He

transitioned thereafter and refocused his remarks from education providing children with a chance to overcome, to education serving American desires (Obama, 2009c). Obama (2009c) explicitly stated “if Black and Brown children cannot compete, then America cannot compete.” More than a year later, at the signing of the Executive Order for the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, Obama reiterated such phrasing. The discrimination and inequalities that Latinos and Hispanics face in public education must be overcome, not for each individual achieving justice and equity, but because it “is an American problem” (Obama, 2010c). He followed this phrase up with statements concerning the necessity of education. Obama (2010c) suggested that “when other countries are out-educating us today to out-compete us tomorrow; making sure that we offer all our kids, regardless of race, a world-class education is more than a moral obligation.” For Obama (2010c), the morality of equity and a country free of discrimination seemed to be less important than providing students with an education because education and schooling “is an economic imperative if we want to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”

In July of 2010, President Obama (2010a) provided another instance where he spoke on the primary importance of American competitiveness in education, and moved emancipation to a secondary level of importance. President Obama (2010a) stated to the National Urban League that the issue of “whether we are offering our children the very best education possible” was going to not only determine “African American success, but the success of our nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Obama (2010a) used this opportunity and statement to begin the promotion of the Race to the Top competition. While admitting that “the civil rights community” criticized certain aspects of Race to the Top, because of

“a concern that Race to the Top doesn’t do enough for minority kids,” Obama (2010c) rejected those criticisms. His rejections were based on what he saw as not helping minority kids and stated “what’s not working for Black kids and Hispanic kids and Native American kids across this country is the status quo” and follows that up by stating “what’s not working is what we’ve been doing for decades now” (Obama, 2010c). Obama then focused on how Race to the Top will help racial minorities. And he stated, “the charge that Race to the Top isn’t targeted at those young people in need is absolutely false because lifting up quality for all children – Black, white Hispanic – that is the central premise of Race to the Top” (Obama, 2010c). With this defense of Race to the Top, Obama (2010c) once again provided to the audience the idea that universal systems will provide the impetus for overcoming discrimination. Obama, in this defense of Race to the Top, placed the responsibility of overcoming discrimination on states and school districts. The way that funding is rewarded to states and school districts meant for Obama (2010c) that “every state and every school district is directly incentivized to deal with schools that have been forgotten, been given up on.” This statement took away the responsibility of the federal government and the President in reducing the structural inequities found in public schools and made states and school districts the sole guarantors of changing generations of inequity. The federal government, and the President’s role in ensuring quality education “for all our children – Black, white, Hispanic” was in rewarding states and school districts money for meeting certain criteria (Obama, 2010c).

From here, President Obama again shifted focus. Concerning education, in the speech to the National Urban league, after talking of Race to the Top and what is needed to insure quality education for all, Obama pivoted back. He states “this is about building

a brighter future where every child in this country – Black, white, Latino, Asian, or Native American; regardless of color, class, creed – has a chance to rise above any barrier to fulfill their God-given potential” (Obama, 2010c). In his last statement concerning the connection of race and education, Obama (2010c) once again provided the familiar phrase of “a chance to rise above any barrier to fulfill their God-given potential” as the purpose of education. Yet through other remarks, in this speech, and others, one is left to wonder if that is really his ultimate view on the purpose of education.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this critical discourse analysis was to examine how the political speeches, addresses and statements of President Barack Obama knowingly or unknowingly continued practices and policies of white supremacy within educational policy and practice by constructing education in a neoliberal frame. There has been previous research concerning how current educational policies and practices may in fact perpetuate inequity and racism within education (Alemán, 2007; Canfield-Davis et al., 2009; Klaf & Kwan, 2010; Miller et al., 2008). Yet there still exists a gap concerning how such policies and practices are promoted to the American people. Through analyzing the discourse used in speeches and remarks concerning education, a discussion concerning the role the President plays in continuing racism within education can take place and advance into more research opportunities. This is essential in the academic field as whiteness still dominates the classroom, the school, and federal education policy. Whiteness does this by making teachers' unable to discuss race, distributing racial minority students to high poverty population schools unequally, and decreases the years of experience teachers have inside of a high minority population school when compared to high white population schools (Castagno, 2008; Wise, 2010).

In order to complete this study, the researcher focused on two main research questions to identify how President Obama may have conveyed an agenda that reinforces white supremacy in elementary and secondary public education through neoliberal policies and practices. The two research questions are as follows:

5. What educational philosophy does President Barack Obama communicate through the selected speeches?

6. What aspects of race are communicated through the speeches of education policy of President Barack Obama?

In order to complete this analysis and uncover such influence, it was necessary for the researcher to determine the relevant texts that should be fully analyzed. I collected, read, and analyzed the transcripts of the seven speeches or statements outlined in Chapter One and presented to audiences by President Obama. The data was pulled from these speeches and addresses to help determine the ways in which President Obama focused discussion and attention of educational policy, and how that communication may impact racism in education. The data was collected through searches of the official transcripts openly available at the Official Federal Department of Education website (ed.gov) and the Official White House website (whitehouse.gov).

## **Findings and Interpretations**

### **Findings Concerning the Communicated Educational Philosophy**

There is ample evidence that President Obama connected education to the economy (Obama, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2011). He mentioned the connection explicitly in each of the speeches analyzed. Obama portrays the connection between education and the economy as historically important. However, the connection portrayed between education and economy by President Obama was not just in the past tense. Often throughout the data, Obama implored a present and future connection between education and the economy.

Data also seems to suggest that President Obama consistently talked of education as a means to compete against other countries. The call for “higher standards and higher expectations; more time in the classroom and greater focus on subjects like math and

science” (Obama, 2011) are to help American students outcompete other nations on international tests. Throughout the speeches in this data, Obama consistently and continually relied on international tests to validate the success or failure of United States education.

While President Obama (2010a, 2010c, 2011) cited education as “an economic imperative” for the whole country to focus on and as a site of competition against other countries, he also stated education is important for individual students. This importance for the individual is, not surprisingly, of economic importance. American youth, in the assumptions that can be made from Obama’s statements throughout the data, should think of education as a means of finding a job (2009b, 2009c, 2011). Success in this realm is measured through international assessments. By referencing international assessments as the benchmark for determining individual economic success and national economic superiority, President Obama also argued standards will improve the scores on those international assessments. President Obama’s urging for national standards was often connected with espousals of an initiative from President Obama and his Department of Education entitled Race to the Top. Race to the Top was a grant that awarded money to states that advanced the adoption of national standards, measured student growth through data systems, and turned around low achieving schools (US Department of Education, 2002).

President Obama also addressed other aspects of public education in his speeches. He consistently makes a point to suggest that education and schools are a failing enterprise within the United States (Obama, 2009a; 2009c; 2010a; 2010c). He put forth some common strategies to improve the educational system. Firstly, Obama (2009c;

2010a; 2011) seems to suggest that charter schools provide benefits to the American educational system. He also suggested, when talking of teacher quality within the United States,, the need for improvement from teachers throughout America, and the need for rewarding and recognizing good teaching (Obama, 2009b; 2009c; 2010a; 2010b; 2011). To overcome the failure of schools, President Obama (2009b; 2010a; 2010c; 2011) often asserted that immediate influences such as states, cities, districts, parents, and students themselves are the most responsible for educational success.

Through the continuous assertions, statements, and remarks throughout this data, President Obama seems to have embraced a neoliberal philosophy towards education. Welch (1998) suggests that neoliberal education reforms are based on principles of “economics and business management” (p. 171) while Hursh (2007a) adds that the reforms also “focus on increasing efficiency through privatization, markets, and competition” (p. 514). President Obama in speaking directly to both the principles of economics in education and the need for competition whether globally or through charter schools adheres to promoting this neoliberal philosophy. Through the communication of this philosophy when talking of education, President Obama may have contributed to continuing racial inequity in public education. He may have continued inequity in education through speeches, statements, and remarks to various audiences in how he defined education as a tool of the economy and success of schools and in his reliance on competition and individualism to motivate his audiences to positively respond to his educational policies.

## **The Impact of the Communicated Educational Philosophy**

The impact of President Obama defining education as an economic tool might have continued racial inequity by maintaining the economic status quo within society. Bergeron (2008) states that this matter of framing the purpose of education mandates that schools “increase human capital” and “economic efficiency and growth” and in doing so, deemphasize “equitable and democratic development” (p. 350). President Obama consistently espoused that education served to stabilize, grow, and secure an economic future. To Obama (2010a; 2011), the country deserved a strong education system because of economic concerns – whether that means gaining a good job, attaining prosperity, or establishing better workforce training. He at no time mentioned the need for an education system that empowers students of every social class to act as responsible citizens outside of the workforce.

Neoliberalism turned education into “a resource for global competition” which enhanced and restored the power of the elite within society by making schools work as economic tools (Sleeter, 2008, p. 1948). Throughout the speeches and statements Obama gave, he also seems to rely on using education as a site of international competition which further intensified his assertions that education serves primarily an economic purpose. Obama noted consistently that the United States does not match up to other nations when performing international education comparisons (Obama, 2009b; 2010c). He seemed to use these measures in xenophobic and jingoistic manners to seemingly compel audiences to agree with assertions that the education system is failing. In doing so, he might have guaranteed that education became glued to the economy. The success of America, and the ability of America to again become superior to other countries, is of

utmost concern. What seems to not be of concern is how the focus on international competition guarantees that the pursuit of high standardized test scores will continue to dominate educational concerns while equity issues will be left behind.

The framing of education through the speeches and statements of President Obama also indirectly seemed to align with Leonardo's (2009) suggestion that schools currently help children learn the "dispositions necessary for the reproduction of capital" and learn their place in society: either as privileged or as unprivileged (p. 47). This once again stemmed from Obama's seeming reliance on education as an economic tool that serves to garner students' future occupational opportunities (Obama, 2009b). A decline of education within the United States for Obama (2009b) "is untenable for our economy" and even put at stake "the American Dream." To reverse such a decline Obama suggested that new assessments and new standards be used that will measure the skills that will be necessary in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These skills are not concerned with cooperation, with social justice, with striving towards an equitable America. Instead they are centered on entrepreneurial skills and business acumen. Obama asserts that the need for the development of such skills should start as early childhood programs, where children should be placed – not for the benefit of their own human development – but for the development of job skills.

Furthermore, President Obama's definition of schools as failing or succeeding based on achievement scores also may have helped to continue racial inequity within the American society. As Hyslop-Margison and Dale (2005) suggest, standardized testing misdirects attention to the supposed failures of schools, teachers and students, instead of focusing attention upon the structural and systemic societal features of those failures (p.

40). Obama (2009b; 2009c; 2010a; 2010c) continually suggested that standardized tests and achievement scores were valid and reliable indicators of individual and school success or failure. Every mention of international rankings or of academic accountability measures were based upon achievement criterion that are ultimately discriminatory and biased. Even in assertions that there is an achievement gap within American schools; Obama relied on assuming that the achievement gap is the result of individual racial minority children not being able to achieve what their white peers achieve. He failed to convey any consideration that the tests themselves might be structured in a way to limit achievement of racial minorities, or that they may continue the status quo of white students being more learned and educated than their racial minority peers.

By speaking positively of and even asserting the need to strengthen and increase standardized tests, Obama might help efforts that continue white dominance. In American education, because of the innate benefits of whiteness, whites become the group that benefits and gains advantage through test scores that promote high achievement (Parkison, 2009). Obama expected academic achievement to be recognized and rewarded. Such recognition comes for states, comes for districts, for schools, for teachers, and for students. Obama failed to provide the caveat to audiences that academic achievement does not accurately determine the learning that goes on in a school or the impact that a teacher or school environment has on students (Miller, et al, 2008). Obama's conveyance of an adherence to achievement criterion also emphasized schools as competitive enterprises. In this manner, he also could contribute to racial inequity. Throughout neoliberal education philosophy, structural competition is seen as a necessary component of education (Luker et al., 2001). Racial inequity continues when structural competition

enters into education because whites start at an advantage based on generations of benefits. Yet, Obama asserted that competition would usher in change that would make all children perform better. A focal point of his administration and his assurances in investing in change to various audiences came through Race to the Top (Obama, 2009c; 2010a; 2010b). He stated that states would be rewarded monetarily for developing assessments, standards, and reforming their education laws in ways that would further entrench neoliberal education policies. Such coercion, Obama (2010c) asserted would allow all “children to perform better.”

An overall attachment to colorblindness tied with the commitment to competitive education by President Obama could have helped to “fertilize the roots of bigotry and racial discrimination” by widening the chasms of supposed intellectual abilities and falsely documenting “the apparent intellectual inferiority of...minority children who do not compete successfully” (Luker et al., 2001, p. 991). Obama, (2009b; 2009c) in using competitions as rewards and incentives and by using achievement criterion, falsely promoted the idea that white students are learning more and learning better inside of schools. He furthered the idea that “there is a stubborn gap...between how well white students are doing compared to their African American and Latino classmates” (Obama, 2009c). He promoted the notion that Black students drop out of school because they get bad grades and “give up on their education” (Obama, 2009c). He advanced the idea that white classmates achieve more in reading and math (Obama, 2009c). These statements can be justified when looking strictly at achievement based standardized tests. Yet they fail to take into account the challenges outside of school that racial minorities face. They fail to take into account the benefits that economic benefits give to educational

achievement, which positively impacts white students. They fail to give the true picture of racial disparities in American education. Instead, these statements seemed to suggest to audiences that racial minorities do not achieve at the same rate as their white counterparts – and more problematic – such discrepancies are through individual designs and not structural. By possibly allowing audiences to believe that Black students, Latino students, students of any minority race, can overcome by their own individual tenacity and hard work, Obama also could have allowed audiences to believe any failure to reach acceptable achievement is an individual failure.

Obama communicated, knowingly or unknowingly, to the audience an anti-structuralist stance concerning race and concerning individual success. By putting the onus of responsibility on students for their educational achievement - and with communicating that whites achieve more than their racial minority peers – Obama might have mystified the social benefits or structural barriers that still do impact educational attainment. This maintaining of an anti-structuralist stance came even after admitting that racial minorities have more barriers in attaining in equal achievement (Obama, 2009b; 2009c). Yet at no point in his communication did Obama suggest that policies or systems needed to be put into place to alleviate or demolish any of the structural barriers that racial minority students may face inside of public schools. Instead he offered up universal policies for the betterment of all children. Such universal policies will likely only fuel the inequity and inequality experienced to the benefit of white students and to the detriment of racial minority children.

Obama might have also communicated an adherence to institutional racism by helping to maintain a hidden curriculum that still oppresses racial minorities. The hidden

curriculum that perpetuates racism occurs every day in schools throughout the country ideologically and institutionally (Castagno, 2008; Leonardo, 2009). Obama, in many of his statements and remarks seemed to allow the ideological and institutional white dominance to continue in public schools. Throughout his remarks, Obama (2009b; 2010c) spoke of raising standards, and making them “clearer” and “tougher.” These standards, however, consist of standards that will make each student ready for an eventual career and place in the economy; they exist to maintain the current status quo in America that privileges whites. Schools and the curriculum therein, through the continual assertions of President Obama, exist to build skills to succeed economically. A curriculum set in such a manner does little to promote social justice, decreasing economic inequities, or relieving racial inequalities. Instead, it continues the economic domination that whites have held over racial minorities for generations.

President Obama (2010a; 2011) also asserted to audiences that charter schools were a mechanism that could work to improve schools and education in general. Such promotion of school choice to various audiences may also work to continue white supremacy. With the addition of school choice in the fold, as schools integrate and desegregate through the inclusion of people of color, white students start leaving the school and looking for other options (Renzulli, 2005). President Obama, through his approval of charter schools, coincidentally seemed to approve of the racial segregation that occurs when charter schools enter into a school district. Research has indicated that charter schools do not consistently benefit racial minorities, and they also seem to allow white students the ability to segregate themselves from racial minorities (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; Renzulli, 2005). President Obama seemed to prefer to overlook this aspect of

charter schools and focus on the benefit they might provide in helping reach achievement criterion.

President Obama, when speaking of education no matter the audience, knowingly or unknowingly seemed to communicate messages of white supremacy and allowed the continuation of racial inequity in public education. This continuation occurred through his seeming promotion of neoliberal components of education that ultimately lead to inequality and the maintaining of a status quo. Through elements of education policy such as education serving as an economic tool, success being measured on academic achievement criterion, the support of school choice, and continual avowals that education is a competitive entity, Obama seemed to closely align to a neoliberal education philosophy. Correlating with that philosophy is a non-commitment to social justice that will help bring about racial justice. President Obama, instead, through his statements and speeches, seemed to reinforce the structural components that legitimate white supremacy within public education. Through charter schools, through international competition, through achievement scores, standardization, and economically created curriculum, President Obama may have helped to maintain the institutional racism in education that will continue to benefit whites and will continue to harm racial minorities.

### **The Impact of How President Obama Communicates Race**

Throughout this data, President Obama also consistently spoke of race in ways that seemed to elicit a commitment to colorblindness and a desire to transcend race (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Robinson, 2009; Roediger, 2008). While Obama did note that Blacks, Latinos and other racial minorities still experience discrimination within the United States, he seemed to do little to communicate that institutions and structures in the

United States were still responsible for this discrimination, and seemed to do even less to support any actions or policies specifically aimed at correcting generations of racial discrimination. Instead, he seemed to have relied on the use of individual responsibilities as the way to overcome discrimination and racial inequity (Obama, 2009a; 2009c; 2010b; 2010c).

The statements and remarks in this dataset align with Rowland and Jones (2011) finding that Obama asserts that Blacks have a responsibility over their own lives and much of the structural discrimination they face in those lives. While in one speech, to the NAACP in July of 2009, President Obama did allude to the responsibility of the government in creating programs to provide equity, he was far more consistent throughout this data in suggesting that racial minorities are best able to achieve equity through the actions of the individual (2009a; 2009c; 2010c). One of the way in which he framed racial inequity within the United States was through the assertion that racial minorities, namely Blacks, had yoked themselves with a set of limitations that led them to “come to expect so little from the world and from themselves” (Obama, 2009c). In such a sentiment, the first Black President of the United States seems to tell Blacks that the disparities their race faces has been created through generations of discriminatory systems and practices, yet is largely carried on by their own attitudes. This is not the only time he seems to adhere to this philosophy though. In speaking at the Signing of the Executive Order for the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, Obama once again stated that the responsibility of overcoming discrimination and racial disparity was not with the government, not with the greater community, but ultimately with the individual.

Statements such as these might help minimize the role that the government can play in making American society just and equal. This happened even after Obama plainly asserted that government exists to make society more just and equal. And so, President Obama at one point asserted the need for government to be an equalizer, but later and more solidly, asserted that individuals are most responsible. This value of individual transmits to the audience an opportunity to believe that structural barriers are of minimal consequence and racial discrimination and disparity. Obama seemed to convey that education is not designed to be of emancipatory qualities and is not primarily responsible for ensuring systemic wide equity and racial justice. Instead individuals are primarily responsible for their own racial justice, and it must be done by utilizing only their own abilities to overcome “structural barriers” (Obama, 2009b; 2009c). Schools become only a vehicle for individuals to take advantage of their own education so that they no longer have to experience the discrimination that the rest of their race might experience.

It also seems evident that President Obama had a vision for how the future of America and racial equity will evolve. In this case, as correlates with Rowland and Jones (2011) suggestion, Obama (2009a; 2009b) seems to believe racial equity can only come together if all Americans work together. Through this idea, Obama seemed to approach racial equity in a universal lens. Such a thought conveys that programs to overcome structural discrimination are programs which must be applied to everyone and to lift up all Americans equally. As Obama (2010c) stated to audiences, overcoming discrimination and racial injustice is not an American problem and is not specifically the problem of Blacks or Hispanics. Obama (2009a), in his statements, seems to also have implied that white society has been a willing participant in overcoming past racial injustices in

American history. Coupled together, these two premises – first, the idea that racial equity progresses through efforts of all Americans and secondly, the idea that white America has been a willing participant in such progression - might help to maintain “a false sense of hope” about the United States achieving racial justice anytime soon (Teasley & Ikard, 2010, p. 420).

Such false hope may arise through the connotations that develop from President Obama’s remarks. When concerning race, he ultimately seemed to make Blacks, Hispanics, and other racial minorities responsible for overcoming a problem that faces all of society. Racial minorities have experienced continual victimization in America through segregation, through slavery, through housing practices, labor opportunities, education, health care, and law. Yet, the victims are now positioned, by Obama, as the ones that must overcome. On the surface, this seems to follow Freire’s (2002) suggestion that the oppressed must free their oppressors. Yet Obama’s statements have never seemed to meet the ideals of Freire. The main inhibitor of Freire’s ideals in Obama’s statements is his reliance on the individual in overcoming disparities. President Obama identified that it is the responsibility of Black and Hispanic individuals to free themselves from the structural barriers racism has cemented into American society, yet he seems to have failed to provide governmental support for such emancipatory action to take place. Instead, in the statements of Obama, government should seemingly act to achieve justice and equity through policies that benefit all. This view reinforces the benefits that whites have already been given over the past centuries and keeps the status quo in place of whites continually accruing more benefits than their racial minority counterparts.

In making individuals responsible for overcoming institutional racism, President Obama also seems to have provided the opportunity for whites to become distant once again from the racism and discriminatory actions that they and their ancestors are responsible for creating and maintaining. By continual statements of the need for minorities to overcome systemic oppression, Obama might have minimized the role that whites could play in alleviating such oppression, and could have allowed whites to believe that they were not active participants in the continual quest of overcoming the past degradation of racial minorities. The minimization of the need for whites to be active participants in overcoming structural barriers aligned with the symbolism that Obama portrays according to Love and Tosolt (2010). The symbolism of Obama to Love and Tosolt (2010) creates a vision of racial unity which makes “whites feel comfortable.” Obama, in his mandates of individual responsibility for Blacks and Latinos, seems to have left it possible for whites to not feel as if they had a role to play. Instead racism and ending racist struggles were stated by the first Black President of the United States to not be in the concern of white Americans. The problem of racism in America was undoubtedly in the words of President Obama (2010c) “an American problem.” Yet the solution to racism that Obama seemed to convey consistently to the audience must come through the work of those enduring the problem – those that are the victims of racism and white superiority.

### **Summary**

President Obama throughout his speeches and statements concerning education, no matter the audience, seemed to communicate a philosophy of education that strictly aligned to neoliberal ideals. These were based on four principles. First, education is best

defined as a tool of the national economy and learning should be premised upon the benefits it gives to the economy. Secondly, competition across education will create innovation in schooling techniques and give students the best chance at a complete education. Thirdly, teacher performance and quality can be and should be based on explicit quantitative measures. And finally, academic achievement and educational excellence is the primary outcome of schools – all for economic purposes.

President Obama seemed to be most consistent and clear in his expectations that education should serve as a tool for economic improvement at both the individual child level, at the national level, and at the global level. He founded this idea upon historical connections that highlighted innovations in education with growth in the United States economy. From there, he made reference to the economic crisis that faced the nation throughout the last three years of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and correlated that with decreasing rates of success and proficiency from schools. President Obama, in this vein, also made education visibly necessary to the audiences he spoke to, by legitimating it as a key part of international superiority. Obama continually referenced the need for international supremacy in education as a justification for the advancement of national standards and a reification of neoliberal ideals in education.

Statements concerning education made to audiences by President Obama also seemed to promote an organizational structure of technical rationality to achieve educational excellence. First, he suggested that school choice as a legitimate entity in public education. First of all, school choice for Obama served as a necessary step to enter into education when a school failed to meet the obligations set forth under current neoliberal practices of school accountability. President Obama openly opined for charter

schools to be implemented as a way to improve student achievement, even with no direct or compelling evidence that charter schools may improve achievement or learning at all. He also willingly promoted charter schools throughout his speeches and statements by consistently mentioning the ways that specific charter schools were improving educational outcomes for students. At opportunities to provide examples of charter schools or public school counterparts to showcase the work that went into educating children, Obama consistently chose to highlight the work of charter schools. Such actions again seemingly show his commitment to charter schools and to school choice as an acceptable and necessary component of public education.

President Obama also seemed to consistently outline the need for teacher accountability, quality, and recognition. In the ways he communicated teacher quality, President Obama gave clear indications that a quality teacher could be easily identified, measured, and observed. Statements concerning the need to recognize teachers for their performance also are premised on neoliberal components. First accountability factors are placed upon teachers that can exemplify how efficient a teacher is in their practices. Secondly such performance also creates a culture of competition among teachers, all competing to be the highest recognized teacher. These actions limit a school from being a collaborative and cohesive unit, to one based on competition and efficiency. Schools with such a mindset, and teachers being recognized in this manner than take on the look of a corporation and a business, and again become reified as economic in nature.

The final way in which Obama's statements seemed to exemplify a commitment to the neoliberal educational philosophy is through his focus on educational achievement and academic excellence. Obama continues the practices of Presidents since Ronald

Reagan in judging how successful a school is based on quantifiable achievement criterion. These judgments are then passed on to audiences and become inculcated into daily life. Yet, these judgments are inaccurate and discriminatory. The continuing reliance upon achievement criterion allowed Obama to continue the suggestion that America schools are failing and that education reform needed to be even more rigorous. Obama suggested the need for common national standards, increased testing, the establishment of innovative schools, and increased educational time as key areas of reform that would elicit further educational achievement. He failed to mention that achievement consistently has more to do with the economic status of a school and student than anything else. He failed to provide the audience with an understanding that it was likely structural barriers that kept some students from experiencing the achievement necessary. Yet he never failed to call out individuals for not taking enough responsibility in overcoming structural barriers. In fact, Obama consistently provided to audiences the idea that individuals – whether they be teachers, parents, or students – were responsible for their success or failure. And he did all of this using the premise that achievement was the correct criterion upon which to measure the success or failure of individuals or schools.

Concerning race, perhaps the statement that best exemplifies President Obama's seeming commitment to the American status quo of racial inequality, structural discrimination, and racial disparity comes from his statements at the signing of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. He stated that education is "about building a brighter future where every child in this country – Black, white, Latino, Asian, or Native American; regardless of color, class, creed – has a chance

to rise above any barrier to fulfill their God-given potential” (Obama, 2010c). In that brief statement, Obama seems to have conveyed to the audience his two consistent messages concerning race. First, overcoming racial inequality is individualistic. Secondly, the larger society can continue as is with structural barriers still in place. Obama in talking of overcoming racial inequality consistently put the onus on individuals. Time and again he stated that the victims of racial disparities needed to overcome the barriers that were in place. Much less consistently and forcefully, did he ever mention the need for those barriers to be broken down. This allowed for audiences to continue to think of race in individual manners, and allowed whites to believe that there was nothing they could or should do in helping to eliminate the institutional racism that still plagues the United States. President Obama also never conveyed to the audiences a need for the government to be more accommodating to racial minorities that have experienced centuries of neglect and harm. Instead, in promoting social and racial justice, the government in Obama’s eyes, should consistently work at the universal level to create opportunities that would benefit all Americans; those universal opportunities would leave whites to continue to outprivilege racial minorities and maintain the status quo of racial inequity.

The most alarming part of Obama’s statements concerning race were those that seemed to suggest that structural barriers do exist. Obama acknowledges racial inequity and discrimination. Yet he in no way sponsored the destruction of such inequity and discrimination. Instead he relied on the long moral arc bent toward justice to do the work of overcoming racism in the United States. The first Black President of the United States ultimately took a hands-off approach to correcting racism. Instead he relied on

individuals to spur action. He relies on individuals to overcome racial inequality in ways that will benefit them, but will not destroy the structural and institutional racism that still exists. He relied on the future to take care of a problem that could be taken care of now.

Through how President Obama talks of education and talks of race in those education speeches, he may continue a conveyance of white supremacy to audiences. Obama's continual assertions to audiences that education is of an economic purpose created the backbone for the rest of his statements concerning education whether those were based on school choice, teacher quality, or academic excellence. Each of those components served the basic core tenet of his educational message that school was most importantly an "economic imperative" (Obama, 2011). Since it is an 'economic imperative,' in Obama's beliefs, public education is tied to maintaining the status quo of a capitalist society that promotes racial inequality. Since it is an 'economic imperative' the possible work of schools in helping dismantle racial disparities is left unsaid and unattained. Instead, individual children are left to battle against generations of oppressive institutional racism.

### **Use of Research**

The findings of this research should provide a view of President Obama that closely aligns his statements and policies concerning education with his four immediate predecessors: George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George H.W. Bush, and Ronald Reagan. Just as they had done during their administrations, President Obama is wrapping education into a neoliberal frame. Not by coincidence, does this neoliberal education paradigm correlate with the neoliberal economic paradigm that has been promoted by the United States government, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund over the

last thirty years. While it is damaging and disconcerting enough that his predecessors adopted and spoke of the benefits of neoliberal policies, it is even more disconcerting to hear President Obama maintain this line. Neoliberalism empowers the status quo. It strengthens the dominant-subordinate relationships that have developed. In the United States this means succinctly that neoliberalism promotes policies that are racially unjust and continue racism throughout the society. The purpose of this research project is not to imply or state that President Obama has individual deep hatred for racial minorities. This research project does not define racism in that manner. Racism is defined by this research project as consisting of processes, systems, practices, and institutions that promote the supremacy of one race while subjugating other races. President Obama through the speeches and statements he continually made to audiences concerning education promoted white supremacy. And he promoted white supremacy through praising, endorsing, and justifying neoliberal education reforms.

This research project should also be utilized to continue the dialogue and discussions concerning race in education. It is of the viewpoint of the researcher that education policy as it is currently maintained within the United States is structurally unjust and racially biased. It is impossible, from this perspective, to not realize how tied together race and education are. As it currently stands schools are providing unequal opportunities for different races, and allowing the status quo of white supremacy and racial minority subordination to continue. This research can be utilized in discussing how the current administration, even with their far apart calls about education being the “civil rights issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” fails to match that rhetoric with what they consistently promote to audiences. It can help to promote the argument that President Obama’s

devices to supposedly improve education, will only further lock public education into a neoliberal structure.

This research project also should be continued to be used as the United States continues to evolve. President Obama is the first racial minority president, but it is virtually impossible to believe he will be the last. He will also not be the last in promoting educational policy to various audiences. While other researchers such as Carpenter (2005), Eshbaugh-Soha (2004), and Staton and Peebles (2000) among others do focus on how Presidents use their speeches and statements concerning education policy, there is not a high volume of such research. This research should provide another piece to add to the library of Presidential addresses and statements and educational policy. This will become even more valuable as current trends suggest that the ‘local control’ of education is being diminished and dismantled by current reform efforts. If current trends continue, the President of the United States and the federal Department of Education will have more immediate control over the content, the curriculum, and the happenings across public education. As that happens, it will become even more necessary to have historical research that addresses how past presidents have spoken of education, the purpose of education, and its role in society.

### **Limitations**

There were some limitations to this research, even though the researcher maintains that the limitations were for the most part minimal and did not impact the study or the findings. The foreseen limitations as written in Chapter 1 were evident and will be recognized first. The first limitation discussed in Chapter 1 was based on my role as a white scholar conducting research on the first Black President of the United States and

the ways in which he may continue white supremacy. When conducting the research, I found, on occasion, myself questioning my analysis – especially concerning the individual responsibility that Obama consistently demanded of racial minorities. In the history of the United States, any civil rights that have been earned by minority groups have been earned through the dogged effort of individuals. It was their tenacity and their unwillingness to be treated inhumanely that helped their descendants gain a more equitable future. President Obama’s concern with individual responsibility could be his own assertion that the government and the majority will not willingly dismantle the structural barriers that continue racism within the United States. I weighed that heavily throughout this research. My final belief though is that Barack Obama, as President, no longer needed to call for individual responsibility in order to overcome barriers. Instead, he could effectively start the process of dismantling the structural barriers of racism. This example was the time where I felt my limit as a white researcher did have an impactful role with interpretations and meanings.

Another limitation I mentioned earlier in this research project was being able to ascertain the true inner thoughts and beliefs of the author being analyzed. At that point I suggested it was impossible to know what President Obama truly thinks of education and if he truly believes in the ideologies, practices, and philosophies that he espouses throughout his speeches and addresses. I hold true to that statement. This project was not about determining the inner beliefs and thoughts of President Obama. Instead it was focused on how his speeches and statements promoted the continuance of white supremacy and racist structures within education. I believe I have held true to that throughout this research project. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know what President

Obama truly believes is necessary in providing education to children. It is not possible to know if he has the same philosophies for learning as he does for the federal Department of Education. It is also impossible to know if his philosophy of the purpose of education for the individual coincides with what he sees as the purpose of education for the country. There may be a difference. He could view education as empowering and emancipatory for the individual, while still maintaining that it is of economic necessity for the country. Ultimately, this discourse cannot know what President Obama believes. Instead, it can only know what he communicated to audiences and how that may or may not have promoted a certain educational philosophy for the audience members to hold onto.

A final limitation mentioned in Chapter 1 concerned the set collection of speeches that were studied and analyzed for this project. Using the seven speeches did provide solid understandings and answers to the first research question which was based on the educational philosophy promoted and communicated to audiences. Unfortunately, I do not feel as confident concerning my answers to the second question, which concerned how Obama communicated aspects of race to various audiences. It may be Obama's desire to transcend race (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Robinson, 2009; Roediger, 2008) that limited the statements concerning race, or it could be of just not focusing on the right speeches. No matter what caused it, many of these speeches lacked any substantial mention of race. For that reason, there were times during this research where I would have liked at other speeches that Obama gave that may have more of a focus on race. Yet they were not in the original collection of speeches, and so I did pursue such action.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The key findings in this research were that President Obama consistently conveyed a neoliberal education philosophy and that racial barriers could be overcome through individual responsibility. Future research can and should continue in this area. First, As President Obama seeks to get reelected; it will be interesting to see how campaign speeches concerning education may align or deviate from the education policy speeches and statements he made during his first term. In that same vein, President Obama, if reelected, also may shift how he speaks of education and the policies he seeks may also change. It may then become beneficial and of worth to compare the speeches and statements concerning education in his first term to the speeches and statements concerning education in his second term.

While one could do that for education, future research could also compare how President Obama talks of race in his first term compared to how he speaks of it in his second term. There are, in my opinion, two speeches in which President Obama speaks strongly of race and racial relations and barriers within the United States – the first is *A More Perfect Union* in Philadelphia in March of 2008; the second is his address to the NAACP on July 17<sup>th</sup> of 2009. It will be of interest to see if President Obama provides another strong statement or address concerning race during his campaign for reelection or during his second term if he is elected to one. Studying how he addresses the nation concerning race longitudinally from his first campaign to his last campaign or term may provide a better insight into how he views race, and how his views may have changed from his time as the President of the United States.

While previous research has been conducted concerning the role Presidents have played in educational policy, I believe that in the future, research could delve much deeper. The ability to collect transcripts of Presidential speeches and addresses is easier than ever with technology capabilities always expanding. For that reason, in-depth research on how each President positioned education may be of benefit to the educational policy community. Analyzing the discourse of Presidents separately may also provide some context into how public education is practiced and implemented currently, and how white supremacy in education was continued throughout American history. While researchers may analyze the discourse of past presidents, future research should be continued with each future President. Analyzing how Presidents speak concerning education and how those statements may continue racial inequity will be of absolute necessity until the United States is racially equitable.

### **Self-Reflection**

Since 2007 I have known that I would be writing a dissertation in order to gain a doctorate degree. Since 2009 I have known that any dissertation I wrote would be focused on the racial inequity of current public education within the United States. It has turned into my passion. I hoped from the start of this process that this dissertation would help in some small way. This dissertation and the experiences of it – the reading, the reflecting, the writing, and the discussing – provided so much clarity as to the deep complexities of structural barriers concerning race. At times this was disconcerting and provided for a pessimistic outlook onto education within the United States, and even the whole United States itself. Yet, as President Obama was so keen to mention, it has always been the work of individuals to overcome the worst parts of the United States history and

society. In the end, the experience of writing this dissertation provided for an optimism that cannot be stated strongly enough through writing.

Education can be changed. This society can be changed. It can be done by individuals. It can be done by governments. Any manifestation of neoliberal practices and philosophies currently in place are not destined to be there, are not naturally there. Instead, they are manmade. They have been built purposefully and they have been built through speeches, through books, through campaigns, and through policies. They can be eliminated in much the same manner, and in time they will be. That time is of importance though. Too long, and generations of Americans are impacted by inequitable and unjust policies. This dissertation solidified my desire to ensure that neoliberal policies are ended sooner rather than later.

It is of my belief that this dissertation is ultimately about leadership. One of the most important parts of any leader's position is communication. And there is no better example of that than the President of the United States. The President is in constant communication with the people of the United States through speeches and statements. The audiences, the citizens, of the United States know the President through what he says and what he does not say. What he finds meaningful enough to speak about and what he finds able to be left out in communication. Presidents and education are no different. They can provide the nation with an understanding of how education and schools should be working to better the country. In the past thirty years, Presidents have been most concerned with how education can be utilized to further the economy. They have been able to suggest that economic problems are because of poor schools. They have been able to suggest that students are not equipped for college or for careers. They have not ever

needed to mention that education should be first and foremost an emancipatory construct for each individual kid in America. Schools during this same time period have functioned as factories of achievement instead of gardens of growth. And that maintains the status quo. A status quo built on inequity which continues racial subjugation.

What is said can be followed. What is not said cannot be followed. A leader is ultimately in charge of what can be followed. This mostly happens through what they say. An educational system that is continually only said to be of economic use becomes only of economic use. Kids become tools. They become numbers. They become statistics. They become rankings. An educational system that is continually mentioned as competitive in nature becomes built on efficiency. It becomes built on outputs and outcomes. It becomes built on the idea that kids cannot learn on their own, but must be coerced into it by teachers.

Words have meaning. Words have power. And the speeches and statements that Presidents make shape policy and shape the beliefs of the nation. If they are committed to social justice, social justice becomes a part of the nation's beliefs. If they are committed to the status quo, the status quo remains in power. Leaders when faced with such power, must do whatever it takes to break down any inequities, to end any systemic advantages that the status quo has garnered to one group over the others. Leaders must act. A large part of those actions are from the words they choose and the phrases they speak to audiences.

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## Appendix A

### Graphic Organizer of Speeches and Remarks

<b>Speech Title</b>	<b>Date Given</b>	<b>Importance of Speech to this Research</b>
Inaugural Address	January 20, 2009	President Obama’s Inaugural Address was a historical moment in the United States. It culminated the election of the first Black president in the history of the country. Friedman – a day before Obama’s swearing - hoped that the speech Obama gave at his inauguration would set the tone for the rest of his presidency – a “radical” presidency (2009). Not radical in terms of left-wing or right-wing fanaticism, but radical in the chance to do something major – to take the momentum that came with the history of the day and parlay it into a ‘consequential’ redefinition of the social contract (Friedman, 2009). The reason for inclusion of this speech was not for how heavy the education content was within the speech, but for the overall purpose of creating a baseline for what Obama expected out of a social contract and out of himself as President. The philosophies brought forth in how to be citizens, how the United States would carry on internally, and how it would act globally through the address is viewed as the starting point of Obama’s presidency and agenda-making power.
Remarks by the President to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on a Complete and Competitive American Education	March 10, 2009	In an address to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Obama used the opportunity to outline the policies and philosophies for education he would promote throughout his term as President. According to Stout, Obama “used a speech here to flesh out how he would use federal money and programs to influence policy at the state and local level” (Stout, 2009). This speech was chosen to analyze for the exact reason that Stout lays out. As the crux and foundational speech of Obama’s educational policy agenda, this address is essential and necessary to any analysis of the educational philosophy of the Obama presidency. The audience in attendance also plays a factor in this choice. The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce operates under a mission of supporting and promoting businesses owned by Hispanics. This representation of a racial minority within a United States provides for another level of analysis. The analysis of this speech will not only occur concerning education, but also concerning how Obama promotes educational philosophies and policies that might be racist in nature to groups representing people of color.
Remarks by the President to the NAACP Centennial Convention	July 17, 2009	According to the organization’s website, one of the purposes of the NAACP is to “ensure that all students have access to an equal and high-quality public education by eliminating education-related racial and ethnic disparities in our public schools” (naacp.org, n.d.) In matters of education, this speech is important in how Obama sought to convey his educational agenda to an audience concerned with eliminating racial and ethnic disparities. In matters of race, this speech was important, as it was the first time in Obama’s presidency that he directly spoke to the largest organization representing racial minorities within the United States (Thompson & Thompson, 2009). The considerable time he spent discussing both the hardships that face racial minorities and the importance he placed on education within the speech; make this a consequential speech to analyze.
Remarks by the President on Education Reform at the National Urban League Centennial Conference	July 29, 2010	Like he did with the NAACP, President Obama took the opportunity to address educational concerns in front of an audience of National Urban League members. This speech, a little over a year after the speech to the NAACP and almost a year and a half after his first foray into setting an educational agenda, responded to “criticisms from some minority and teachers groups” (Calmes, 2010). Therefore this speech will be deft at helping the analysis of any longitudinal shift within Obama’s educational agenda. The audience again also plays a vital role. Just as with the NAACP

and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Obama spent major time detailing his educational agenda to a particular group – a group of members representing racial minorities. This speech will help to discuss how Obama speaks of inequity and discrimination within education to representatives of racial minority groups.

Remarks by the President at a Youth Town Hall Sponsored by BET Network	October 14, 2010	This town hall setting was sponsored by BET and MTV networks and encompasses various parts of Obama’s domestic and international agendas. For the purposes of this analysis, there are six questions from audience members and replies from the President that will be used for the analysis. These six questions contain responses from Obama concerning race and/or education and were dispersed randomly throughout the entire town hall. As this audience was comprised of a high number of younger Americans and a high percentage of racial minorities, it will again help to elicit how Obama speaks of education and race to racial minorities.
Remarks by the President at the Signing of Executive Order for the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans	October 19, 2010	The purpose of the initiative was to increase engagement between the Hispanic community and “anyone working within the education system nationwide” (Fox News Latino, 2010). At this signing, President Obama delivered remarks detailing the initiative, the importance of the initiative, education in general, and the impact education has on Hispanic and Latino peoples. Therefore, these remarks are necessary to include in this analysis concerning race and education. They will also provide further data for longitudinal analysis.
Remarks by the President on Winning the Future in Education	March 8, 2011	President Obama traveled to Boston to speak to an audience of students that attended TechBoston Academy – a charter school located in Boston, Massachusetts. In this speech, President Obama hailed and hammered away at “his themes of innovation and education” (Landler, 2011). This speech will give credence to the longitudinal change or stability of Obama’s educational agenda. With the primary focus of this address being on innovation in education, Obama spoke of what the future of education should be about and also, how his agenda would push that forward. It will provide a final piece in the longitudinal analysis of what has stayed consistent and what has changed throughout the seven speeches to be analyzed.

## VITA

Thomas W. Hairston was born in Columbia, Missouri. He graduated from the University of Missouri with a Bachelor of Arts in History in the Spring of 2004. He then worked for a year at the United States Naval Academy with the Naval Academy Athletic Association in Annapolis, Maryland. Tom moved back to the state of Missouri in May of 2005 as he realized his calling in education. Beginning in the fall of 2005, Tom was a student under his father, Dr. Hap Hairston, at Central Methodist University and earned his Masters of Education at that institution in May of 2007. In May of 2009, Tom earned his Educational Specialist Degree under the advisement and guidance of Dr. Jerry Valentine at the University of Missouri. In 2012, he earned a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Missouri in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis.

Tom spent five years teaching at Moberly High School in Moberly, Missouri from 2005-2010. Since that time he has worked as an educational consultant for the Heart of Missouri Regional Professional Development Center at the University of Missouri.