

The Rhetoric of Presidential Expectations and Barack Obama's Burden

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“As we stand at this crossroads of history, the eyes of all people in all nations are once again upon us,” President Barack Obama observed in his February 24, 2009 *Address before a Joint Session of Congress*. He believed that the world was “watching to see what we do with this moment, waiting for us to lead. Those of us gathered here tonight have been called to govern in extraordinary times. It is a tremendous burden, but it is also a great privilege, one that has been entrusted to few generations of Americans. For in our hands lies the ability to shape our world for good or for ill.”¹ That President Obama overtly recognized the “crossroads of history,” the “moment,” the “extraordinary times,” indeed, the “tremendous burden” of his presidency, only one month into office is a comment both on the awesome responsibility of the presidency in general and on Barack Obama’s presidency specifically. Yet, as the Smithsonian American History Museum’s exhibit “The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden” demonstrates, any president faces an intimidating burden upon assuming office.² Does the “moment” within which a president assumes office really affect his or her presidency, as Obama suggested? I believe that the answer is unequivocally yes, the moment within which a president takes office can matter and it can matter a great deal.

In President Obama’s case, after nearly two years of Obama promising “hope” and “change” on the campaign trail many Americans listening to Obama’s address that night might well have believed that Obama’s presidency really could reshape the world for good. Other Americans listening that night might have worried that the Obama presidency would reshape the world for ill. Still others might have wondered if the

“extraordinary times” – the startling economic collapse of 2008 while America fought two wars abroad, coupled with increased political partisanship at home, America’s diminished international reputation, a media environment that thrived on division, and his historic role as the nation’s first African-American president – would hinder Obama’s ability to lead, to reshape the world, at all. As Obama noted, leading in extraordinary times is both a “tremendous burden” and a “great privilege,” for such moments of profound change demand heroic leadership in the face of insurmountable obstacles.

In order to evaluate President Obama’s ability to lead, we must first examine the rhetoric of presidential expectations, which I argue has grown more heroic in character since World War II. Next, I argue that our nation’s heroic expectations for the presidency has set up three kinds of presidential burdens: institutional burdens (the “Glorious Burdens” specific to the office of the presidency itself); contextual burdens (burdens specific to the historic moment within which the president assumes office); and, personal burdens (burdens specific to the man or woman who becomes president). Although many presidents have acknowledged the overwhelming expectations of the office, scholarly work on how those expectations are rhetorically constructed and how a president’s burden affects his or her ability to lead remains largely undone. This is a regrettable lacuna because the president’s burden forms an important element of the rhetorical context within which he or she operates, and thus, ought to be understood.

The Rhetoric of Presidential Expectations

That Americans have what we can think of as “heroic expectations” for the president cannot be denied – we expect that he or she would act at a minimum as the Chief Administrator, Chief Diplomat, Chief Legislator, Chief Magistrate, Commander in Chief, Chief Executive, Ceremonial Head of State, Manager of the Economy, Party Leader, and National Leader – much more than the U.S. Constitution prescribes. Ray Price, an aide to Richard Nixon during his 1968 campaign for the presidency, warned the eventual 37th president of these expectations:

People identify with a President in a way they do no other public figure.

Potential presidents are measured against an ideal that’s a combination of leading man, God, father, hero, pope, king, with maybe just a touch of the avenging Furies thrown in. They want him to be larger than life, a living legend, and yet quintessentially human; someone to be held up to their children as a model; someone to be cherished by themselves as a revered member of the family, in somewhat the same way in which peasant families pray to the icon in the corner. Reverence goes where power is.³

Empirical documentation supports Price’s claim. For example, George Edwards and Stephen Wayne show that prior to his inauguration, significant percentages of Americans expected Barack Obama to satisfy a wide range of lofty tasks, including working effectively with Congress (89%), managing the executive branch wisely (84%), and fulfilling the proper role of the United States in world affairs (80%).⁴ These numbers

were comparable to (and in some cases higher than) the high expectations preceding George W. Bush's inauguration in January 2001, when 81% of Americans felt Bush would set a good moral example for the nation, 78% felt he would use military force wisely, 74% expected him to work well with Congress, and 72% anticipated proper fulfillment of the United States in world affairs.⁵ These numbers compare with expectations of other recent presidents. In The Public Presidency, for example, George Edwards reported public opinion data that demonstrated sizeable majorities expected both Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan to accomplish such mighty policy tasks as reducing unemployment and inflation, increase government efficiency while reducing its cost, and dealing effectively with foreign policy while strengthening the national defense.⁶ In short, Americans have unrealistic expectations that the President of the United States has the power to control every facet of government. How did Americans come to expect so much from their presidents?

Pika and Maltese argued that "we have glorified the memories of past presidents. The 'great presidents,' particularly those who took decisive action and bold initiatives, and even some of the 'not so great' are treated as folk heroes and enshrined in a national mythology."⁷ As Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles observed, most of us will never have direct knowledge of the presidency, therefore "for most citizens the presidency is only and always a representation, an image of a reality that can never be known."⁸ That that representation is glorified and heroic means that "for most Americans, the presidency is larger than life, transcending normal human limitations."⁹

These representations and the expectations that they inculcate affect both the presidency in general and specific presidents in particular. According to Dennis M. Simon they “are part of the historical inheritance that awaits every new president. They are, in a sense, imposed on every incumbent, regardless of party or ideology.” Whether or not the president has heroic ambitions, “these expectations shape how presidents are covered by the press as well as how they are perceived and evaluated by elites and the mass public.”¹⁰

We could think of the “great” presidents as those who abided by the letter of the constitution, balanced the budget, did not interfere with setting national policies, or any other number of metrics. Yet, we do not. Since Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. began polling historians about presidential greatness in 1948, historians have consistently rated George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt “great” and less consistently rated Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Harry S Truman as “great” or “near great.”¹¹ The “great Presidents,” argued Schlesinger Sr., “were strong Presidents. Each of them magnified the executive branch at the expense of the other branches of the government.”¹² Polls of presidential greatness both reflected pre-existing notions of who and what should count as excellence in office as well as created benchmarks for others to judge future presidential excellence. It seems tautological to argue that polls of presidential greatness constitute presidential greatness, but that is precisely what I mean. Polls of presidential greatness are a kind of rhetorical discourse that helps

Americans to understand, position, frame, and delimit the presidency; the polls have a constitutive function in our understanding of the American presidency.¹³ One way to understand these polls then, is that through them Americans learned that the only great presidents were those strong presidents who consolidated power in the Executive Branch – or, who acted as what scholars today call an “imperial president.”¹⁴

Since the original 1948 poll, pollsters have asked citizens, academics, and politicians to rate presidential greatness. The rankings of the top presidents – Washington, Lincoln, and FDR – have been consistent, as have the bottom “failure” presidents: Ulysses S. Grant, Warren G. Harding, James Buchanan, Herbert Hoover, and (eventually) Richard Nixon. Yet, despite these consistencies, the polls are controversial, with other presidential fortunes rising and falling based upon new assessments of the past, current values, and pollsters’ ideological leanings. “How the hell can you tell?” asked President John F. Kennedy when Schlesinger Sr. sent him the poll in 1962, “Only the president himself can know what his real pressures and real alternatives are. If you don’t know that, how can you judge performance?”¹⁵ Schlesinger agreed that Kennedy had a point – to a degree – but that did not stop him, or his son Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., from continuing to inquire after presidential greatness. I believe that these polls of presidential greatness played a constitutive role – however small – in defining how we think about presidential power. These polls constituted the “great” president as a heroic leader rather than as a competent chief executive. As Schlesinger Jr. explained in 1963, “the heroic leader has the Promethean responsibility to affirm human freedom against

the supposed inevitabilities of history. A purposeful and vital democracy must rest on a belief in the potency of choice – on the conviction that individual decisions do affect the course of events.”¹⁶ In the Schlesinger view of presidential greatness, therefore, the great president is a hero who protects human freedom and democracy by changing the course of history, these are not small expectations to be sure.

One might wonder how much influence polls of presidential greatness might really have in constituting the public’s expectations of the presidency. After all, how many Americans read these polls and how much weight do citizens and politicians give to the musings of historians? It is certainly a difficult question to answer with any certainty, but I argue that by providing a consistent standard by which to judge presidential “greatness,” these polls helped to constitute if not the presidency, then at least expectations about the presidency. Schlesinger Sr. explained the 1962 results by arguing that historians judged the presidents based upon a series of questions, all indicating a president’s power and his or her success in changing history: “did the President head the nation in sunny or stormy times? Did he exhibit a creative approach to the problems of statecraft? Was he the master or servant of events? Did he use the prestige and potentialities of the position to advance the public welfare? Did he effectively staff his key government posts? Did he properly safeguard the country’s interest in relation to the rest of the world? How significantly did he affect the future destinies of the nation?”¹⁷ While in 1973 Schlesinger Jr.’s The Imperial Presidency decried the consolidation of power in the Executive Branch, as Gene Healy and others

have noted, “Schlesinger Jr.’s polls, like his father’s, heavily favored imperial presidents.”¹⁸ In 1948, 1962, and 1996 Americans were treated to the Schlesinger interpretation that great presidents were strong presidents who changed history. The consistency of the ratings across polls conducted by the Schlesingers and others since 1948 (with some notable differences due to partisan leanings, for example in 2000 a Federalist Society/Wall Street Journal poll ranked Ronald Reagan “great,” whereas in 1996 Schlesinger Jr. found him merely “average”) demonstrates that the Schlesinger interpretation influenced the public’s understanding of how a president should be judged, if not the precise judgments for particular presidents.¹⁹

The Schlesingers may not have intended to cultivate heroic expectations for the president, but it is hard to read Schlesinger Sr.’s approving description of the “great” presidents—“every one of these men left the executive branch stronger and more influential than he found it. As a matter of course they magnified the powers expressly granted them by the Constitution and assumed others not expressly denied by it.”—without also learning to applaud those heroic presidents who had the manly fortitude to expand the powers of the presidency, change history, and protect freedom and democracy.²⁰ Even if today we might question a Hegelian narrative that positions one person with the agency to change the course of history, we seem to expect that the president would have the heroic ability to do just that. Indeed, according to Bruce Buchanan, “Americans are impressed more with vigorous and assertive than tentative or reluctant uses of presidential power.” As my discussion of how the Schlesinger polls

constituted expectations about the presidency would lead us to expect, “both mass public policy results and the rankings of presidents by historians indicate that Americans prefer the ‘take charge’ president who is willing to seize the initiative and try boldly to make things happen.” Of course presidential polls alone did not constitute heroic expectations. Rather, “an impression of the presidency is imbedded in the public mind by families, schoolteachers, media, social interactions, and other elements of the socialization process.”²¹ The standards and expectations of historians for presidential greatness in combination with the exaggerated accounts of presidential power found in school textbooks, popular culture, and presidential precedent form what Buchanan has called “presidential culture,” what Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn Parry-Giles have called “presidentiality,” what Barbara Hinckley has called the “symbolic presidency,” what Thomas Cronin has called the “textbook presidency,” and what James MacGregor Burns has called the “heroic presidency.”²²

I have argued that the constitutive discourses of presidential polls, textbooks, and popular culture help to create heroic expectations and that these heroic expectations, in turn, constrain and enable specific kinds of presidential rhetoric. When we think of the presidency as heroic then we judge presidential leadership based upon whether or not the president unified the nation, whether or not the president demonstrated a high degree of agency (the ability to control world history), and whether or not the president consolidated power in the Executive Branch. Conversely, if we thought of the presidency as non-heroic then we might judge presidential

leadership based whether or not the president acknowledged the interconnectedness of world events without stressing the agency of the president to control history or whether or not the president sought to equalize power among the three branches. Not only do we judge presidencies as “great,” “average,” or “failures” based upon heroic expectations, but we also often judge presidential *rhetoric* based upon heroic expectations.²³ Heroic expectations therefore form a part of the burden of the presidency because they set unrealistically high standards for presidential success and mandate that a president use what Robert Hariman has called the “courtly style” within a “republican fiction” that supposedly shuns imperial leaders, no small rhetorical burden for any president to negotiate.²⁴ Further, I have argued that we both desire “great” presidents who are strong leaders and decry the consolidation of power in the Executive Branch that such presidential greatness would require. These contradictory expectations for the president form an important element of the rhetorical context within which any president operates and contribute to the president’s burden, for how can any president both be a “great” heroic leader who changes history and also work within the confines of constitutional limitations? Below I explain how the rhetoric of heroic expectations can help us to make sense of three kinds of presidential burdens: institutional burdens, contextual burdens, and personal burdens.

Heroic Expectations, Heroic Burdens

“There are no easy matters that will ever come to you as president;” Dwight D. Eisenhower counseled President-elect John F. Kennedy on January 19, 1961 as Kennedy prepared to assume office. “If they are easy, they will be settled at a lower level. So that the matters that come to you as president are always the difficult matters, and matters that carry with them large implications.” Two years into office President Kennedy believed that these difficult decisions were a large part of what he described then as the “burdens of the office of the presidency.”²⁵ Kennedy was not alone in referring to the presidency as a “burden.” While it was true that eighteenth century presidents like George Washington described the office as an “arduous but pleasing task” and nineteenth century presidents like Andrew Jackson described the office as “arduous duties,” by the twentieth century it was common for presidents to characterize the responsibilities of the office by using the word “burden.”²⁶

For example, at the dawn of the twentieth-century William McKinley believed that “anyone who has borne the anxieties and burdens of the Presidential office, especially in time of National trial, cannot contemplate assuming it a second time without profoundly realizing the severe exactions and the solemn obligations which it imposes, and this feeling is accentuated by the momentous problems which now press for settlement.”²⁷ As McKinley explained, anxieties, burdens, exactions, obligations, and problems would weigh on the minds of all those who held the office. Whether described as an “arduous but pleasing task” or as a “burden,” as Eisenhower told

Kennedy, the office has always required its occupant to make tough decisions under difficult circumstances. The job is indeed arduous, but is there more at stake than word choice in the difference between thinking of the presidency-as-task and the presidency-as-burden? Because we have little direct experience with the presidency we rely upon representations of the office and those representations often constitute great presidents as consistently heroic and powerful. Yet, Forrest McDonald explained that there is a “vast gap between expectations” and any president’s “capacity to deliver,” which makes the president “totally responsible for situations that [he or she] is helpless to manage.”²⁸ Indeed, our heroic expectations for the presidency bear little relationship either to the constitutional limits on the president or to any president’s ability to fulfill the expectations – or, what Richard E. Neustadt has explained as the “expectations gap.” These heroic expectations contribute to the president’s burden because they ask the president to seek to control every facet of the political community – to make laws, conduct wars, control the economy, create a lasting worldwide peace, etc. – whether or not they have the constitutional power to do so. Perhaps no president in recent memory has entered office with a greater burden of heroic expectations than the forty-fourth President of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama.

Institutional Burdens

Just as Richard Neustadt famously demonstrated that presidential power lies in a chief executive’s persuasive abilities rather than in any positive legal tool, George

Edwards has demonstrated that the president's ability to influence Congress is marginal.²⁹ This itself is a reflection of a persistent inability to move public opinion,³⁰ a cornerstone requirement of Samuel Kernell's seminal "going public" thesis and Neustadt's own model of leadership.³¹ At the same time, while the federal court system is generally supportive of presidential power, particularly concerning foreign policy and especially in times of war, the constitutional constraints and institutional structures prohibiting presidential influence over the court system are as obvious as they are robust. Furthermore, even in the branch of government the president formally sits atop, the chief executive's ability to control the federal bureaucracy is limited and conditional. Despite decades of politicization, centralization, and other forms of manipulation, recent presidents have struggled to wield the kind of influence required to keep their political promises and achieve their policy preferences. In short, the modern president faces a leadership dilemma.

We teach schoolchildren basic civics lessons about the Constitution's separation of powers and checks and balances, about how the constitution stands in the way of any one branch of government dominating the others. Yet, in order to win office modern presidential candidates – including Barack Obama – promise far more than orderly checks and balances would allow. With Obama, such promises crossed a range of ambitious, yet substantive policy initiatives, including: universal health care, immigration reform, shuttering Guantanamo Bay's enemy combatant prison, repealing the Bush tax cuts, increasing government transparency, limiting the role played by

professional lobbyists, and creating a cap and trade program to battle the burgeoning global warming crisis. The president's accomplishments on these issues was mixed, and he quickly learned that even on the most noteworthy successes, a myriad of structural barriers limited his ability to accomplish all of his aims. Congress watered down his health care bill and tabled consideration of immigration and climate change legislation, while the president was quickly forced to either compromise or back away entirely from promises concerning Guantanamo Bay and the Bush tax cuts.

Making matters even more muddled, many of Obama's campaign promises were ambiguous and arguably unachievable, by any measure. Casting his candidacy as one dedicated to hope and change, his supporters expected to see change, not just in policy, but in how Washington worked, and to see it immediately. Obama nurtured this expectation, promising to turn the page on dysfunctional partisanship and restore Americans' fair shot at their dreams—lofty yet vague goals that he would be poorly positioned to achieve.³² That is, Obama was poorly positioned, to control the partisan behavior of not only his side but also of the opposition. Presidents certainly serve as the heads of their parties, but they can hardly count on unlimited and consistent support from their fellow partisans, particularly in Congress. The opposition's disinclination toward cooperation is almost guaranteed.³³ Republicans were united in opposition to President Obama, so much so that Republican congressional leaders identified the defeat of Obama in 2012 as their single greatest priority. This overwhelming opposition, on votes and in tone, prompted a chastened Obama to acknowledge, less than a year

after his inauguration, the promise for a new American politics had gone unfulfilled. In a speech at Vermont Avenue Baptist Church in Washington D.C. in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., Obama noted:

There were those who argued that because I had spoke of a need for unity in this country that our nation was somehow entering into a period of post-partisanship. That didn't work out so well. There was a hope shared by many that life would be better from the moment that I swore that oath. Of course, as we meet here today, one year later, we know the promise of that moment has not yet been fully fulfilled.³⁴

The promise of a new era of politics, one where ugly partisanship was diminished and the lives of every day Americans enriched, remained unfulfilled, and largely because of the structural and constitutional obstacles standing between the president's goals and political reality. Perceptively, however, Obama went on to note other important reasons why his promise remained unfulfilled, reasons I turn to in the next section of this essay. According to Obama, the context of the moment, and particularly the banking crisis and related economic troubles, was the primary reason why the promise of hope and change on election night 2008 had not been fulfilled by 2010.

Contextual Burdens

While any president faces heroic expectations upon assuming office, some presidents assume the office during what George Forgie has called an "heroic age," or

what we can understand as a time of national crisis.³⁵ Presiding over the nation in an heroic age raises the expectations for presidential greatness both because the stakes are so high and because judgments of success or failure are based upon the immediate consequences of actions taken to resolve the crisis. President Obama acknowledged as much in his February 24, 2009 Address before a Joint Session of Congress when he described the “crossroads of history,” the “moment,” and the “extraordinary times” within which he and Congress had been asked to lead. Further, President Obama reminded Congress that the “world” was watching, waiting for them “to lead” – to control history – and that this was a part of their “tremendous burden.” That President Obama sought to share his burden of heroic leadership with Congress is noteworthy, and a point that I will return to shortly. For now, it is important to recognize that President Obama understood his election as defined by the demands of a heroic age. Indeed, how could he not understand? His election campaign had been defined from its infancy by the burden of heroic expectations.

The 2008 presidential election had been framed as a comment on heroic leadership as early as May, 2006 when Sean Wilentz attempted to explain to the readers of *Rolling Stone* why 81% of the 415 historians surveyed by the *History News Network* in 2004 had ranked the presidency of George W. Bush a “failure.” Wilentz observed that President Bush was faring equally poorly in public opinion polls, which in mid-2006 showed that only about 35% percent of the American population approved of Bush’s job performance – a figure matched only by Richard Nixon right before “his resignation

in 1974." In his explanation of Bush's meager presidential reputation Wilentz listed a long train of Bush's supposed abuses and usurpations, including: "an unswerving adherence to a simplistic ideology"; "choosing partisanship over leadership"; irresponsibly running up the "largest deficit ever"; being "outwardly hostile to science"; his "catastrophic responses to Hurricane Katrina"; using "signing statements as if they were line-item vetoes"; and, "expanding the powers of the presidency beyond the limits laid down by the U.S. Constitution." Taken together these abuses of power and neglect of duty equaled nothing less than a reverse of "presidential greatness." Wilentz explained that the great presidents – Washington, Lincoln, and FDR – "were the men who guided the nation through what historians consider its greatest crises: the founding era after the ratification of the Constitution, the Civil War, and the Great Depression and second World War. Presented with arduous, at times seemingly impossible circumstances, they rallied the nation, governed brilliantly and left the republic more secure than when they entered office." Bush's performance ranked him alongside those "calamitous presidents" – Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, and Hoover – who "divided the nation, governed erratically and left the nation worse off." Wilentz believed that the attacks of September 11, 2001 provided Bush with "an extraordinary opportunity to achieve greatness," but believing himself to be a "messianic liberator and profound freedom fighter, on a par with FDR and Lincoln," Bush acted "in ways that have left the country less united and more divided, less conciliatory and more acrimonious."³⁶ These are searing indictments, to be sure; however, my purpose in recounting them is not to agree or disagree with Wilentz's assessment of the Bush

presidency, but to use Wilentz's essay to help us to understand the contextual burdens facing whomever won the 2008 election.

First, we can observe that Sean Wilentz's explanation of how historians judged presidential greatness in 2006 is the same as that used by the Schlesingers in 1948, 1962, and 1996: the "great" presidents were Washington, Lincoln, and FDR because, facing great crises, they were able to act as heroic leaders who controlled history, united the nation, and used the power of the presidency to leave the nation better off than they had found it. Second, in Wilentz's negative assessment of Bush's presidency we can observe the continued contradictions of heroic expectations: Wilentz compared Lincoln's use (or abuse) of presidential power during the Civil War to Bush's and argued both that Bush was secretive/duplicitous about his expansion of presidential powers *and* that Bush overtly argued that the president had such powers during war time. In either case, according to Wilentz, Lincoln – governing brilliantly – was justified in expanding the reach of the presidency, but Bush – governing erratically – was not. Third, Bush's failure to live up to the burden of heroic times meant that as much as he might believe that he was a "great" president like Lincoln or FDR, he was actually a "calamitous" president like Buchanan or Hoover. Bush's calamitous failure meant that the next president would have an even greater burden than Bush because that president would have to deal with an even more troubled nation, an even larger crisis – the same situation in which Lincoln and FDR found themselves following the presidencies of Buchanan and Hoover. And, finally, in judging Bush's presidency a failure, we learn

that both historians and citizens rejected Bush's use of imperial presidential power, which meant that whomever won the 2008 election would face increased scrutiny over its use. If Wilentz's analysis was correct, then the forty-fourth president indeed would have one of the largest burdens in American history.

It was clear as early as 2006, therefore, that there would be much at stake in the 2008 election. In order to save the republic the next president had to be on par with Lincoln or FDR—two of the nation's perennial "greats"—this was an heroic moment indeed, requiring a heroic president. In 2004 little known Illinois State Senator Barack Obama gained national attention for his rousing Democratic National Convention speech in support of Democratic Party nominees John Kerry and John Edwards.³⁷ In his Convention speech Obama famously proclaimed the American people's "audacity of hope," a phrase that became the title for his 2006 *New York Times* bestselling book, in which he offered his "thoughts on reclaiming the American Dream."³⁸ Something about what Obama said in his 2004 speech and in his 2006 book seemed to resonate with Americans for by the end of 2006 the now junior Senator from Illinois found himself regularly asked if he would run for president in 2008.³⁹ At first Obama demurred, but by January 16, 2007 he posted a YouTube video in which he declared that because "our leaders in Washington seem incapable of working together in a practical, common sense way," he had formed an exploratory presidential campaign committee in the hope of advancing "the cause of change and progress that we so desperately need."⁴⁰ On February 10, 2007 Obama officially announced his candidacy

in a speech delivered in Springfield, Illinois, a location chosen specifically to reference Lincoln's legacy of presidential leadership.⁴¹ "What's stopped us is the failure of leadership," Obama told the crowd gathered in Springfield, "the ease with which we're distracted by the petty and trivial, our chronic avoidance of tough decisions, our preference for scoring cheap political points instead of rolling up our sleeves and building a working consensus to tackle the big problems of America." Obama promised that as president he would lead, he would roll up his sleeves, he would tackle the big problems of America, and he would control history.

As Obama launched his bid for the Democratic Party nomination in late 2006 and early 2007 he therefore had some sense that the calamitous failure of the Bush presidency had created a great need for heroic leadership, but few could have predicted how grave the nation's crises would become by the November, 2008 election.⁴² Between February, 2007 and November, 2008 the nation witnessed an astounding collapse of the economy: rising gas prices in the Spring and Summer of 2008 (up to \$4.49 a gallon) contributed to rising commute and food prices;⁴³ American wages, which had been stagnant since 1999 actually regressed;⁴⁴ more and more Americans were unemployed or under employed, with unemployment rates increasing in each month of 2008 until they reached 6.5 % by October, the highest levels since 1994;⁴⁵ housing prices had been falling in some markets since 2006, but by April, 2008 news outlets reported that home prices across the U.S. had dropped 15.3% since the year before, the largest drop since The Standard & Poor's/Case-Shiller home price index began keeping track of prices in

2000;⁴⁶ by June the Mortgage Bankers Association released data that showed that 1 in every 100 U.S. homes was in foreclosure (double the rate from the previous year), which led to short sales and the loss of property tax revenues for state and local governments;⁴⁷ in the Summer and early Fall of 2008 big Wall Street firms like Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, and AIG collapsed due to their “toxic investments” in sub-prime mortgages;⁴⁸ in early September, 2008 the government placed mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac into “conservatorship” in order to prevent a complete collapse of the financial system;⁴⁹ and, on September 29, 2008 the stock market tumbled 778 points, the largest ever single day loss.⁵⁰ The economic crisis overshadowed, but did not eclipse, the nation’s many other crises: the unpopular, unsuccessful, and costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; the nation’s poor health care system; the nation’s crumbling infrastructure; the nation’s dependence on foreign oil; the world’s changing climate; the poor quality of the nation’s public schools; the nation’s declining international reputation; the growing disparities between the rich and the poor; the growing vehemence in partisanship; the problems of immigration, and on, and on. In short, just like the election of 1860 or 1932 the times themselves called for a heroic leader. Obama attempted to constitute himself as that leader. His opponents – Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Sarah Palin – repeatedly questioned whether or not he was ready to lead.

Clearly, the central question of the 2008 presidential campaign was who was best prepared to lead the nation out of its many crises. Yet, while the times called for heroic

presidential leadership, we must remember that the nation also was wary of the imperial presidency. Thus, every presidential hopeful in 2008 had both to argue for his or her leadership credentials and do so in such a way as to appear to be a brilliant leader like Washington, Lincoln, and FDR rather than a calamitous leader like Buchanan, Hoover, or Bush. Obama negotiated this rhetorical situation masterfully by positioning himself as a Washington outsider who could bring necessary change, as the only candidate who had the good judgment to oppose the war in Iraq, and, by promising to lead by sharing the burden of heroic times with all American citizens. While these features are prominent in Obama's campaign discourse, I argue that his rhetorical strategies were buttressed by his campaign's organizational structure. Above all, Obama's campaign took on the appearance of a movement, which reinforced at the level of organization his arguments at the level of discourse.

Barack Obama raised more money, from more donors than anyone in the history of American politics (750 million total, 500 million online, from more than 200,000 individuals).⁵¹ By election night in November, 2008 his campaign had an email list of over 10 million supporters – the largest database of its kind.⁵² When Obama made a public appearance he regularly drew crowds in excess of 40,000.⁵³ His image sold more t-shirts, more posters, more coffee cups, more newsmagazine covers, more swag than most celebrities.⁵⁴ Obama had won the presidency by over 9 million votes – the largest margin for a non-incumbent and the 6th largest ever.⁵⁵ After Barack Obama's election comparisons between his presidency and those of the perennial greats became

ubiquitous: President-elect Obama appeared as Abraham Lincoln on the cover of the November 15, 2008 *Newsweek*; as FDR on the November 24, 2008 cover of *Time*; as George Washington the cover of the January 26, 2009 *New Yorker*, and on, and on.⁵⁶ We can read these comparisons along with the entirety of the Obama phenomenon as proof of our expectations for him to rise to the challenge of the heroic age. When he took office on January 20, 2009 his approval rating was 65%.⁵⁷ In the most recent poll of presidential greatness conducted by Siena College in 2010, Obama already ranked 15th, or in the “almost great” category and in the 2011 United States Presidency Centre, Obama ranked 8th overall.⁵⁸

Throughout the two-year primary and election campaign Obama had argued at the level of campaign organization and discourse for decentralized power, for empowering citizens to take up the obligations of patriotism for themselves and remake America, but while a decentralized campaign could work—especially one that was centrally orchestrated so that it was both centralized and decentralized—could he use a decentralized strategy to govern? After all, our heroic expectations meant that once Obama became president the burden of the heroic age would be his alone, even if—as he sought to do with his February 24, 2009 Address Before a Joint Session of Congress—he would choose to share his burden with Congress and citizens. Indeed, through his messages of hope and change Obama had repeatedly reminded Americans of their obligations to one another and in so doing, he attempted to share the burden of the heroic age with all Americans. “But the reason our campaign has always been

different,” Obama told the crowd in New Hampshire on January 8, 2008 after his primary loss to Hillary Clinton, “is because it’s not just about what I will do as president. It is also about what you, the people who love this country, the citizens of the United States of America, can do to change it.” Obama regularly closed his speeches on the campaign trail with some variation of “now it falls to us. Together we cannot fail.”⁵⁹ He even attempted to share the burdens of the heroic age with Americans in his election night victory speech on November 4, 2008. “Let us summon a new spirit of patriotism, of service and responsibility,” Obama urged the ecstatic crowd in Chicago’s Grant Park, “where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other.”⁶⁰ Barack Obama’s campaign both promised heroic leadership and attempted to share the burden of hope and change with all Americans, which may have allowed his campaign to negotiate the contradictions of America’s heroic expectations in the wake of the calamitous Bush presidency, but once in office, would Obama find himself all alone with his burdens? The answer is obviously yes, both because *he* was elected president and because of our heroic expectations of the presidency.

Personal Burdens

Out until the early morning hours celebrating his inauguration at a series of balls and parties the night before, Barack Obama entered the Oval Office for the first time as president at 8:35 AM on the morning of Wednesday, January 21st, 2009.⁶¹ For ten minutes, before he would be met by Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, Obama had the office

to himself, time enough to read the note left for him by his predecessor, George W. Bush, and to meditate on the challenges that faced his administration, challenges that included the burdens addressed previously in this essay as well as those like no president before him. Every American president has had to deal with separation of powers and the other structural barriers that prevent fully robust leadership, and Obama is only the most recent in a lengthening line of presidents who have had to govern in the current age of polarization, a line that includes predecessors going back at least as far as Ronald Reagan, perhaps as far as Richard Nixon. Several of his predecessors have had to face times of duress and crisis early in their terms, whether in terms of the economy (Martin Van Buren during the Panic of 1837, Grover Cleveland and the Panic of 1893, Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression), armed conflict (William McKinley, Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon), or even, like Obama, both (Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, George W. Bush). Nevertheless, none of these presidents, even those facing arguably more Herculean leadership tasks such as FDR and Lincoln, ever had to carry the personal burdens borne by Obama.

Obama's greatest personal burden as both presidential candidate and as the newly inaugurated president was his race. For most observers an African American president was inconceivable until Obama's rise as a serious candidate for the Democratic nomination in 2007, itself made possible by Obama's star turn at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. Other African American candidacies, namely those of

Jesse Jackson and Shirley Chisholm, never rose to the level of plausibility. Obama himself, of course, had spent a great deal of time imagining himself as a black president, a notion that only emerged after nearly a lifetime of contemplating his own blackness and its role in shaping his sense of self. Obama was well aware of the burden his race played in his life, both privately and publicly. Indeed, in his celebrated memoir, Dreams from My Father, Obama reflected at length on the role of race in his life, making a careful yet earnest assessment of his place in the world. In a particularly illuminating passage, where he writes about the way his mother taught him to think about the role race played in his life and in modern American public life, he noted that to be black was “to be the beneficiary of a great inheritance, a special destiny, glorious burdens that only we were strong enough to bear.”⁶²

Obama’s optimism about the ability for African Americans to bear this burden, at least all the way to the White House, was not universally shared. In a thoughtful, though not entirely prescient, volume published less than a year before Obama’s general election victory over John McCain, Shelby Steele argued that the two-dimensional nature of Obama’s appeal would also prohibit his ascent to the Oval Office.⁶³ Calling Obama a “bound man,” Steele contends that Obama performs the role of a bargainer with whites, implicitly signaling a willingness to forgive their racism if they’ll look past his race, while he simultaneously appeared as a challenger to the black community, willing to leverage white guilt into black political advantage. To Steele, this contradiction cannot be sustained. Sociologist Thomas Sugrue has made a similar

argument, rooted in Obama's hybrid vision of race relations, one which reconciles a version of Obama more along the lines of Steele's bargainer style of black leadership by showing how such an orientation facilitates coalition-building and progress for all Americans, including African Americans.⁶⁴

Wilbur Rich has linked Obama's so-called post-racial approach with the pressures of heightened expectations for his administration, and in doing so notes the way developments in both Obama's campaign and early administration were racialized, from the controversy over candidate Obama's pastor, Jeremiah Wright, and the important speech on race it led Obama to deliver to events like the arrest of Henry Gates and the firing of USDA employee Shirley Sherrod.⁶⁵ These events show that regardless of Obama's personal orientation toward race and his uncanny ability to appeal in different ways to different attentive constituencies, unpredictable developments continually force him to respond to race-driven dynamics in a singular way. Although every president has had to deal with racial matters,⁶⁶ has had to confront it as systematically and as personally as Barack Obama. Further, only Obama has had to engage in race-related policy-making as both chief executive and racial symbol simultaneously. Such an observation is consistent with the argument of Law Professor Randall Kennedy, who painstakingly demonstrates the inability for Obama to be viewed in any way divorced of racial connotation and context.⁶⁷ As moments such as the Gates and Sherrod demonstrate, the racial euphoria felt in early November 2008 – Rich, for example, points to a post-election poll that showed nearly 70% of Americans

felt race relations had improved⁶⁸ – was temporary, that where Obama realized that he was a blank screen upon which people project their own views, he forgot or perhaps failed to realize that whatever those views may be, nearly all would be colored by racial considerations.

Indeed, it is the inescapability of race and racism that ponders some to question whether secondary burdens borne by Barack Obama, those that may not seem on their face to be racially constructed, are in actuality driven by racial considerations. For example, in an era where outright racial attacks are considered by nearly all to be out of the mainstream, conventional attacks against Obama in the election and after tended to revolve around three basic precepts: his policy preferences were far too liberal, verging into the terrain of socialism, for the American public; he lacked the experience (and occasionally also courage) to make correct, difficult decisions about problems at home and relations abroad, and his youthfulness and thin resume belied the fact that his candidacy was based more on celebrity than on pedigree.⁶⁹

Obama himself expressed awareness of the linkage in a 2008 fundraising speech in Jacksonville, Florida: “[The Republicans are] going to try to make you afraid of me. He’s young and inexperienced and he’s got a funny name. And did I mention he’s black?”⁷⁰ Furthermore, Obama was not alone in his suspicions that attacks on his popularity and unorthodox professional background (unorthodox insofar as presidential aspirants are concerned, at least) were thinly veiled racial dog-whistles. For example, British journalist Melissa McEwan wrote in the Guardian that an infamous

McCain ad conflating Obama and maligned celebrities such as Paris Hilton and Britney Spears went deeper than the surface level attack against Obama's intelligence and competence; rather, she alleged it also suggested to white conservative voters the threat of miscegenation. According to McEwan, "Obama, dog whistles the ad, hitting old racists in the sweet spot, could fuck these white girls - its practically a Democratic tradition ... JFK, Clinton, heck even Carter lusted in his heart - and we don't want that, now, do we?"⁷¹ Similarly, *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert began a piece on the racial undertones of McCain's campaign against Obama with the following rhetorical question: "Gee, I wonder why, if you have a black man running for high public office - say, Barack Obama or Harold Ford - the opposition feels compelled to run low-life political ads featuring tacky, sexually provocative white women who have no connection whatsoever to the black male candidates."⁷² Herbert goes on to suggest that these ads were designed not to effectively communicate that Obama was a celebrity or unprepared for presidential pressures, but rather to position him as the Other, to simultaneously question Obama's patriotism and citizenship and designed to "exploit the hostility, anxiety and resentment of the many white Americans who are still freakishly hung up on the idea of black men rising above their station and becoming sexually involved with white women." The fact that Obama had not only to endure this attack, but do so "with a smile and heroic levels of equanimity," was, Herbert argued, due solely to the fact of his blackness.

But even if such allegations by McEwan, Herbert, and others were to be proved groundless, the notion that Obama rose to the presidency on a wave of celebrity appeal, despite a lack of governing experience and policy expertise remains its own burden. Just as George W. Bush was subject to dueling and apparently contradictory allegations that he was at once intellectually ill-equipped for the job of president yet some version of an evil genius craftily ushering in an arch-conservative age, attacks on Obama's early presidency posited that he was both unprepared for and unaware of the powers and responsibilities of his office while secretly positioning the nation for a run at socialism. Underlying racial context or not, the persistent perception among various sectors of the American electorate that the president was a Hollywood-driven lightweight with dubious goals and questionable skills remained a burden all Obama's own.

Conclusion

"In the United States we like to 'rate' a President," explained Richard Neustadt; "We measure him as 'weak' or 'strong' and call what we are measuring his 'leadership.'" ⁷³ I have argued that these kinds of rankings have a constitutive role on the presidency and form an important element of the president's "glorious burden."

An understanding of the institutional, contextual, and personal burdens Barack Obama faced in the early days of his administration provide a lens through which we can examine his efforts to establish his presidency. By examining the heightened expectations and the multiple barriers – structural, contextual, and personal – that stood between him and successful satisfaction of his presidential goals, we are better

positioned to evaluate this landmark presidency in both historical terms and in real time. Moreover, by focusing on the constitutive discourses surrounding these expectations, these burdens, and this presidency, we can learn more about how these expectations have been constructed and how to assess their fairness and appropriateness, as well as Barack Obama's ability to satisfy them.

¹ Barack Obama, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress," February 24, 2009. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=85753>.

² Smithsonian National Museum of American History exhibit: "The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden," <http://americanhistory.si.edu/presidency/home.html> The notion that the presidency is a "Glorious Burden" is both widely accepted and completely un-interrogated – stemming from Stefan Lorant's epic The Glorious Burden: The American Presidency (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). Lorant does not define the term or trace the term's provenance. This chapter is an attempt to do a bit of that work.

³ Novak 1974, 44; Pika and Maltese 2004, 25

⁴ Edwards and Wayne 2010, 109

⁵ Edwards and Wayne 2010, 107

⁶ 1983, 189

⁷ Pika & Maltese, *The Politics of the Presidency*, 23-24.

⁸ Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn Parry-Giles, *The Prime Time Presidency*, 4-5.

⁹ Buchanan, *The Citizen's Presidency*, 28.

¹⁰ Dennis M. Simon, "Public Expectations of the President," *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*, 135-159, 135.

¹¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Historians Rate U.S. Presidents," *Life* (25), November 1, 1948, 65-75. Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Rating the Presidents," *Paths to the Present*, 2nd Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), 104-114. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. "Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton," *Political Science Quarterly* 112 (1997): 179-190.

¹² Schlesinger, "Historians Rate U.S. Presidents," 73.

¹³ Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Québécois," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 133-150; James Boyd White, *When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language, Character, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 286-291; Michael Leff and Ebony Utley, "Instrumental and Constitutive Rhetoric in Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'Letter from Birmingham Jail,'" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7 (2004): 37-51; James Jasinski, "A Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Historiography: Toward an Understanding of the Discursive (Re)constitution of 'Constitution' in The Federalist Papers," in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998); Michael Leff, "Things Made By Words: Reflections on Textual Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 223-231; Mary E. Stuckey, *Defining Americans: The Presidency and National Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); and Kenneth S. Zagacki, "Constitutive Rhetoric Reconsidered: Constitutive Paradoxes in G. W. Bush's Iraq War Speeches," *Western Journal of Communication* 71 (2007): 272-293; James Jasinski and Jennifer R. Mercieca, "Analyzing Constitutive Rhetorics: The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions and

the "Principles of '98" in *Handbook of Rhetoric and Public Address*, Shawn Parry-Giles and J. Michael Hogan, eds. (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2010).

¹⁴ "Back in 1973 the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. has affixed an enduring adjective to the Nixon presidency: it was, he said, 'imperial.' This didn't mean that the president literally has become emperor, as some anti-Federalist authors has feared back in the 1780s. But it did suggest both that the occupant of the office exercised more absolute power over more issues than the constitutional framework suggested and, more broadly, that the office itself has expanded in its power relative to other governmental actors."

Andrew Rudalevige, *The New Imperial Presidency: Renewing Presidential Power after Watergate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), ix. Lonnie G. Bunch III, Spencer R. Crew, Mark G. Hirsch & Harry R. Rubenstein, *The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Joseph A. Pika and John Anthony Maltese, *The Politics of the Presidency*, 6th Edition (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2006), 16-17.

¹⁵ Schlesinger Jr., "Rating the Presidents," 180.

¹⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Politics of Hope* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 8.

¹⁷ Schlesinger, "Rating the Presidents," 104-105.

¹⁸ Healey, *Cult of the Presidency*, 5. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

¹⁹ James Lindgren, Steven G. Calabresi, Leonard A. Leo, & C. David Smith, "Rating the Presidents of the United States, 1789-2000," November 18, 2000: http://www.fed-soc.org/doclib/20070308_pressurvey.PDF.

²⁰ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Paths to the Present*, 111. William J. Ridings & Stuart B. McIver, *Rating the Presidents: A Ranking of U.S. Leaders, from the Great and Honorable to the Dishonest and Incompetent* (New York, Citadel Press, 2000).

²¹ Bruce Buchanan, The Citizen's Presidency, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1987), 25-26, 41.

²² Bruce Buchanan, The Citizen's Presidency; Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn Parry-Giles, The Prime Time Presidency; Barbara Hinckley, The Symbolic Presidency (Routledge: New York, 1990); Thomas E. Cronin, The State of the Presidency (Boston: Little, Brown and Co.), 1975; James MacGregor Burns, Leadership (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

²³ Scholars of presidential rhetoric are not immune to the rhetoric of presidential expectations. Indeed, their judgments of presidential greatness share much in common with the judgments of historians and others. Presidential rhetoric scholars have taken a keen interest in those presidencies that historians and other pollsters have rated "great" or "near great" – especially Lincoln, FDR, Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Ronald Reagan – while neglecting those merely "average" or "below average" presidents like Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, and Rutherford B. Hayes. So little was known about the rhetorical practices of this latter group of presidential not-so-greats that in 2002 Texas A&M University hosted an entire conference devoted to them and collected the essays into the aptly named *Before the Rhetorical Presidency*. The essays demonstrated that these "lesser-known chief executives" to a one failed the test of greatness because he failed the "Promethean test" of controlling history. For example, the "Little Magician" Martin Van Buren, "failed to understand – or to rhetorically adapt to – the rapidly changing circumstances of democratic governance"; likewise, "His Accident" John Tyler, while he deserved credit for helping "to establish the principle of executive independence from both Congress and party," was unable to control history by providing "effective rhetorical leadership"; the "Fainting General" Franklin Pierce chose to "avoid politics in favor of the language of gentlemanly decorum," which meant that he did not even attempt to control history; and poor "Tennessee Tailor" Andrew "Johnson's 'enactment of the presidency was ill-suited in almost every possible way to the standards of performance requisite to its success.' As both rhetor and statesman,

Johnson [was] found wanting.”²³ Even while re-evaluating these presidential not-so-greats with fresh eyes, the judgments of rhetorical scholars were still based upon the established standards of greatness: did the president exert his will over the government? Did the president consolidate power in the executive branch? Did the president control history? Did the rhetorical practices of the president satisfy the nation’s heroic expectations? Not surprisingly, the presidents traditionally judged not-so-great continued to be judged not-so-great, likely because these presidents continued to fail rhetorical scholars’ heroic expectations.

²⁴ Robert Hariman, Political Style: The Artistry of Power (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Jennifer R. Mercieca, Founding Fictions (Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press, 2010).

²⁵ John F. Kennedy, “Television and Radio Interview: After Two Years – A Conversation with the President,” December 17, 1962. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9060>.

²⁶ Andrew Jackson, “Inaugural Address,” March 4, 1829. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25810>.

²⁷ William McKinley, “Address Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination,” July 12, 1900: John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=76197>.

²⁸ Forrest McDonald, The American Presidency: An Intellectual History (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 466.

²⁹ George C. Edwards, III, At the Margins: Presidential Leadership of Congress, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

³⁰ George C. Edwards, III., On Deaf Ears, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

³¹ Samuel Kernell, 2006, Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership, 4th ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

³² "Sens. Obama and Biden Deliver Remarks in Springfield, Ill." Washington Post, August 23, 2008.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/28/AR2008082803216.html>

³³ Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher, eds., 2000, Polarized Politics: Congress and the President in a Partisan Era, Washington, DC: CQ Press.

³⁴ Barack Obama, Remarks by the President in Remembrance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., January 17, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-remembrance-dr-martin-luther-king-jr>.

³⁵ George B. Forgie, Patricide in the House Divided: A Psychological Interpretation of Lincoln and His Age (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 6-12.

³⁶ Sean Wilentz, "Worst President in History?" Rolling Stone (May 4, 2006): 32-37.

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<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/convention2004/barackobama2004dnc.htm>

³⁸ Barack Obama, The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006).

³⁹ David Plouffe, The Audacity to Win: The Inside Story and Lessons of Barack Obama's Historic Victory (New York: Viking, 2009).

⁴⁰ Barack Obama, "Barack Obama Announces Presidential Exploratory Committee," January 16, 2007:
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobamaexploratory.htm>.

⁴¹ David Plouffe, Audacity to Win, 31-45.

⁴² Obama routinely linked the nation's burdens to his candidacy throughout the 2007 and 2008 campaign: burden of civil rights (March 4, 2007); burdens of Iraq War, bad diplomacy (April 23, 2007); burden of catastrophic healthcare (May 2, 2007); burden of battle, burden of fighting terrorism (August 21, 2007);

burden on the middle class (September 18, 2007); burdens and benefits of the global economy (February 13, 2008); overburdened state of our military (March 19, 2008); the national debt is an unfair burden on our children (March 20, 2008); terrible burden of losing a home (April 4, 2008); the burden we all bear when workers are abused (April 14, 2008); the burden on Main Street (May 9, 2009); the burden on seniors (June 13, 2008); the military should not bear all the burdens of our foreign policy (July 15, 2008); burden of gas prices (July 15, 2008); burdens of global citizenship; burdens of development and diplomacy; burdens of progress and peace (July 24, 2008); unique burden of multiple deployments (August 19, 2008); burden on struggling homeowners (September 12, 2008); burden of financial bailout (September 19, 2008); Americans bear the burden for the greed and irresponsibility of Wall Street and Washington (September 25, 2008); and, finally, his campaign was unique because it was not burdened with old arguments (October 30, 2008).

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http://articles.sfgate.com/2008-05-23/news/17156363_1_holiday-weekend-travel-weekend-getaway

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⁴⁵ Bob Willis and Rich Miller, "U.S. Unemployment Rate Climbs to 14-Year High of 6.5% (Update2),"

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⁴⁹ Victoria Wagner and Daniel E. Teclaw, "A Fannie-Freddie FAQ: S&P spells out what investors and homeowners need to know about the big bailout," Bloomberg Business Week, September 11, 2008: http://www.businessweek.com/investor/content/sep2008/pi20080910_049754.htm?chan=investing_investing+index+page_top+stories

⁵⁰ Steven C. Johnson, "Dow in record drop on bailout rejection," Reuters, September 30, 2008: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/businessNews/idUKTRE48S86H20080929>

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