

Introduction

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We recognize that the excluded are never simply excluded and that their marginalization reflects and determines the shape, texture, and boundaries of the dominant order and its associated privileged communities. The identities of the latter are inevitably defined in opposition to, and as a negation of, the representations of the marginalized, and in certain respects, the outside is always inside . . . (Iton, 2008, pp. 3–4).

The interconnectedness of the marginalized and the dominant was portrayed in sharp focus during the two terms of Barack Obama's presidency. Although he self-identified as African American—accepting the Blackness of his Kenyan father as well as his experiences as a Black person born in the United States, he also embraced his biracial status as shown by his reverence of his White American mother and grandparents from Kansas. According to Harris (2010), “. . . he was deliberate in presenting himself and his presence as “normal,” and multiculturalism as a practice as opposed to an ideal” (p. 73). Nevertheless, he understood that his body, his presence, and his primary identity would be read as Black in order to fit the country's historical grand narrative and place him in an inferior space. A space that included marginalized others even though Obama occupied what many perceive as the most powerful position in the world—President of the United States of America.

His novel presence in the highest office in the land impacted not only the representation and negotiation of his intersecting identities but also the representation and negotiation of the intersecting identities of the citizens and residents of the United States. As a nation, we grappled with

the dissonance created by having as our president a member of one of the most historically disdained and disenfranchised groups in the country, while simultaneously hoping that his tenure would serve as a positive turning point in race and identity relations. Although there were some changes as a result of Obama's policies, such as the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the Affordable Health Care Act, and the President's support of same-sex marriage, one change that never manifested was the post-race moment. Squires (2014) pointedly states: "That some were surprised at the post-election expressions of White racism and xenophobic nationalism is indicative of the failure of our society to further interrogate the collective memory of racial subjugation and to take accountability for the lasting effects of racial apartheid . . ." (pp. 194–195). The post-race aspiration had no foundation to build upon in an America that refuses to examine why it exists in its current form. Hence, when Obama's tenure began, rather than being perceived as a healing balm for the nation, his presence in the White House served to peel the bandage off of the country's infected and festering racial wound. It became clear that the deep cleaning required to facilitate our healing would not be forthcoming in the eight years or afterwards. In fact, I would add that in order to heal, we would have to be aware of what I propose as the Whiteness Conundrum—namely the intertwining of White supremacy, White privilege, and White indifference that often results in discriminatory policies and practices being applied in a nonchalant fashion. This conundrum supports racism in all of its forms including, but not limited to post-racism, color blindness, and neo-racism, for example. Like most forms of oppression, we may hope that it magically disappears as a result of our good intentions and a little sensitivity training. Yet without intentional recognition, interrogation, radical transformation, or dismantling by all Americans, we fool ourselves into believing that the progress we desire in the areas of equality, equity, justice, and inclusion will have a deep and/or lasting impact. This interdisciplinary volume focuses on the Whiteness Conundrum as it manifests in the form of neo-racism. According to Balibar and Wallerstein (1991), Caballero-Mengibar (2010), and Lee and Rice (2007) neo-racism can be viewed as a transnational phenomenon, and all encompassing "tactical adaptation" that rendered racism more pervasive than in the past by moving beyond targeting groups based on their phenotype and biology alone. Nationality, culture, and identities were now also in play as a means to protect borders and maintain cultural purity among the people. According to Lee and Rice (2007).

Neo-racism finds refuge in popular understandings of 'human nature' and appeals to the 'common sense' nationalist instincts . . .

Discrimination becomes, seemingly, justified by cultural difference or national origin rather than by ‘natural tendencies’ to preserve group cultural identity—in this case the dominant group (p. 389).

It is a type of cloaked ethnocentrism according to Barnard-Naudé (2011) as he cites Balibar’s “racism without races” concept in an essay on how neo-racism is impacting Europe. Cabellero-Mengibar (2010) uses Spain as an example, and cites how immigrants to that country are rhetorically framed in media as threats to Spanish identity and perceived as the perpetual “them” in comparison to the Spanish “us.” Here in the United States, neo-racism’s poisonous tentacles still primarily target people of African descent, in addition to anyone perceived as “other,” such as immigrants, Native Americans, Muslims, the economically disenfranchised, and members of LGBTQ communities, for example.

Neo-racism according to Balibar (1991) is “A racism which does not have a pseudo-biological concept of race as its main driving force has always existed” (p. 23). In Europe the author spoke of its manifestation in the form of anti-Semitism and the conflation of Arabs and Muslims. Today in the United States neo-racism exploits the intersectionality of our identities in order to further discrimination rather than eradicate it. Under neo-racism, there are few safe spaces for those viewed as “other.”

According to Collins (2015), Intersectionality is about “. . . moving beyond a mono-categorical focus on racial inequality to encompass multiple forms of inequality that are organized in a similar logic” (p. 5). Crenshaw (2015), who coined the term intersectionality some 30 years ago as a means of bringing to light the connection of race and gender in Black women’s fight for equality, views the term more expansively today to include people of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse—all of whom face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, ableism, and more.

The perspectives covered in this book are presented to expand the ongoing dialogues about Obama’s presidency beyond the post-racial fantasy. The nation’s festering wound grounded in the Whiteness Conundrum remains in need of treatment. As a result, this book is intended to provide a space for discourses about our intersecting identities and intermingling cultures at this pivotal moment when neo-racism has taken center stage. Contributors examine manifestations of neo-racism from a number of viewpoints including masculinities, leadership, homosexuality, group identity,

discriminatory policies, comedic representations, and Creole spaces as they relate to identity. It is divided into two sections that are soft rather than hard divisions. Part I focuses on President Obama while the second part explores the impact of his policies, practices, and presence.

In chapter 1, Zoë Hess Carney examines the rhetorical constraints of the presidency primarily through Obama's inaugural speeches. She writes that the invisible power of Whiteness permeating American culture and society enables and constrains the rhetoric of those who serve as president. Yet, through his speeches, Obama was still able to shift the focus in his addresses beyond tales of the rugged individualistic White American male to include the collectivism of groups that have often been excluded from the mythology of the American dream.

Shanette Harris examines what it means to be Black, male, and President of the United States through her exploration of transformational masculinity. She proposes that transformational masculinity enacted by President Obama made accessible a corresponding transformation in the performance of femininity by Black women as exemplified by First Lady Michelle Obama. In other words, the space created by the President's transformational masculinity meant Mrs. Obama did not have to perform Black womanhood as powerful without superpowers. According to Harris, these gender role norms surpass the bipolar representation of traditional masculine and feminine norms adhered to by European Americans.

Discussing third-space leadership, Omowale Elson asserts that the issue of hybridity (mixed race/trans-ethnicity) became more complex when it reflected a dimension of power that was unavailable to Blacks prior to Obama's meteoric rise to the presidency. In his chapter he juxtaposes Obama's third-space leadership with that of the Black Nationalist movement's leadership arguing that the Black Nationalist's agenda, and their perception of leadership in black-and-white, resulted in their not being able to view Obama's presidency as a new opportunity for progress.

Part II opens with Nura Sediq's analysis of the hopes and experiences of Muslims during Obama's tenure. While it was anticipated among Muslims that an Obama presidency would relieve some of their pressures as a result of being viewed as the threat within, the opposite in fact turned out to be true. Sediq shows how policies sustained by the Obama administration resulted in Muslims having to reorganize themselves into an unanticipated collective in response to being discriminated against by an administration headed by a man with a Muslim name, and who himself was perceived by many to be a Muslim.

Co-authors Andrew Spieldenner, Tomeka Robinson, and Anjuliet Woodruffe interrogate the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NAAS). Though

Obama was the first U.S. president to produce a national strategy, the authors critique its discriminatory representation of certain communities, particularly Black gay men and Black women. The authors view the linking of Blackness to HIV/AIDS as detrimental not only for those populations, but also in terms of how making the connection stymies conversation in Black communities and their organizations.

Jenny Ungbha Korn covers comedy in a serious light, stating that comedians enjoy a self-described liberty in depicting the racial understandings of society through humor. She suggests that comedy about Obama provided timely insight into the construction and fluidity of contemporary meanings of not just “Blackness,” but also (surprisingly) the role of “Whiteness” in defining and contextualizing the first Black President of the United States. According to Korn, comedic conceptualizations of Obama responded to racial, cultural, historical, political, economic, and social ideologies of the United States of America and re-articulated the differences between African Americans and Caucasian Americans in creating and perpetuating racialized categories via humor.

In the last chapter, Douglas-Wade Brunton focuses on identity and belonging in the United States beyond the hyphen through the idea of a creolized space. Making comparisons to his home of Trinidad and Tobago, he addresses the belonging of Obama in the U.S. through a processing of creolized territories. He is of the view that recognizing the United States as a Creole space that embodies all who have been here may shift our understanding of who is American.

The aforementioned chapters provide critical analyses of neo-race realities as they pertained to our identities during the Obama era. They show that while the change we desired to believe in may have occurred at some level, the deep and necessary change, namely the racial wound cleansing required to heal, continues to elude us seemingly by design. This book presents some of our ills as manifested in a neo-race reality and assists in our comprehension of what *is* rather than what was *hoped* for as a nation with regard to race.

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