



## I Introduction

One of the critical problems in representational democracies is how to choose people who will craft and guide a more equitable form of government, of the people, by the people, for the people, to borrow the words of Abraham Lincoln. In the social practice of politics, voters come to “know” a candidate’s beliefs, character, background as well as programme and policy prescriptions during the campaigning process from various forms of communication, such as speeches, debates, press releases, political ads and blog entries. Choosing a candidate will thus depend in part on an assessment of ‘texts’ (what the candidate, his campaign team and others say and write) that are central to the social practice of electioneering (Reisigl, 2008).

In this practice, candidates present themselves for scrutiny and try to win over voters by convincing the electorate that they, more than their opponents, are the right person to lead. This is a highly complex affair as people choose leaders for different reasons, so candidates must try to broadly appeal to the electorate’s personal interests, sense of identity, worldview and their image of a leader, among other factors. It should be viewed as a dialogic process (Bakhtin, 1981). Candidates craft their message and style partly in response to what they are hearing from the voters, other candidates and the media and once convinced, supporters start echoing the candidate’s message, giving it more credence, currency and authority. Candidates also interact with previous political discourse, such as speeches from the past, multi-media texts or narratives grounded in daily experience and historical events but nurtured and flowered as mythologies (Barthe, 1970).

The candidates’ persuasive appeals are part of what Foucault calls the “general politics of truth”. This being “a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays” (1980:132). In fact, much public discussion about elections centers on which candidate speaks “the truth” and is as such more believable, more legitimate, more “authentic”. As part of this battle, Foucault stresses that “discursive formations”, the rules that govern how and what can be expressed, heard or seen by a sign community, are central to mechanism of control and positions of authority in modern society as they help structure a “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1972:131). Foucault emphasized the objective, rational, and utilitarian language of science, but modern political discourse, including electioneering texts, help maintain

this regime as it functions, according to Chilton (2004), to coerce, to legitimize and delegitimize and to represent and misrepresent. Here the representational modes of pop-culture genres have come to play a more crucial role (Van Zoonen, 2000).

As an exercise in understanding these structuring and signification process and their relationships to broader material issues, social identity and power, this paper looks at the democratic presidential nomination campaign of Barak Obama and, specifically, undertakes a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of his South Carolina primary victory speech. Though the critical study of political discourse has gained greater attention in political science and language fields, still little research has focused directly on campaign speeches, especially those given during the nomination process. Study of US presidential elections shows that campaigning most greatly affects less partisan voters, such as young people, independents and those less politically in touch. (Althaus, S. et. al, 2001). The presidential primaries are somewhat different, since they mostly involve party affiliated voters who are more engaged in the political process. However, there is also initially less ideological divergence than in a general election as candidates agree on many of the issues, so a candidate's textual ways of acting, representing and being, what Fairclough links with genre, discourse and style (pp.27, 2003) become potentially more decisive.

Campaign speeches, an historically popular means of reaching voters and now covered extensively by the mass-media and viewable any time on-line,<sup>1</sup> merit critical attention because they offer an extensive text which can provide an insight into how candidates take on and also shape the kinds of discourse and discursive strategies which help construct and position their persona and platform and convince the electorate to support them. Furthermore, such a study offers a reflective text that may help people resist and contest dominant representations of the present and past, assigned social identities, prescribed moral conduct and other official stories that go into making and marketing the candidate.

This paper in particular applies the CDA approach detailed by Norman Fairclough in *Analysing Discourse* (2003).<sup>2</sup> This approach was chosen, firstly for its

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, on Youtube Obama's South Carolina primary victory speech had been viewed over 1 million times as of September, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Here I use the word "approach" in agreement with Richardson, J. (2007) and Wodak, R. (2002) that CDA is not a homogeneous method, but rather a collection of methods.

consideration of issues of social justice, which arise in the wielding of the increased symbolic, political and economic capital that accompanies an election campaign and victory. Secondly, its orientations at once towards the specific discursal event, with its rhetorical, pragmatic and stylistic features, and the discursive social order offer a more wide-ranging study than traditional rhetorical analysis, as it seeks to “see the interdiscursive character of a text (the particular mix of genres, discourses and styles) as realized in semantic, grammatical and lexical (vocabulary) features of the text at various levels of text organization” (Fairclough, pp. 67, 2003), and link these with socio-economic practice. Such an approach aligns well with a study of campaign speech today, which combines more classical political rhetoric with contemporary political communication influenced by pop-culture and the market.

The specific speech, as a socio-political event, was chosen for several reasons. As part of the process to elect the next leader of the world’s most powerful nation-state, it directly relates to the important issue of governance and thus has socio-political relevance to many people’s lives. It also was given after a significant victory that took back momentum from Obama’s main opponent, Hillary Clinton, and helped generate further excitement that propelled him on to win many contests on “Super-Tuesday” and eventually the nomination. During the campaign, Clinton and her team often complained that Obama was more a man of speeches than deeds. This objection in itself confirms that she rates Obama’s oratory and rhetorical skills highly. Indeed, as the analysis will detail, this speech is notable for both its strategic textual and contextual efficacy, particularly the way it mixes genres, includes and responds to a myriad of voices, and exemplifies the semantic difficulties of attempting a post-racial discourse in US electoral politics. Finally, more than just a speech event, it is a pertinent example of how an oratory discourse is shaped and employed in the art of persuasion and as part of a broader discursive struggle over meaning and truth in efforts to maintain and challenge relations of power and control in society.

## II Societal Context

Since the speech event is tied to broader social practices and trends, first we can consider some of the most pertinent. The campaign occurs at a time when signs suggest America’s global dominance is beginning to wane, and there are

concerns among a large majority (81%)<sup>3</sup> of Americans that their country is heading in a wrong direction. Falling real wages, which have been in decline for almost a decade, record high personal indebtedness (Rick Wolff, 2006) the largest income gap since the depression, continuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a lack of health care insurance, little progress on climate change initiatives, and a president and administration that disregards international and domestic laws are key areas of discontentment. This has heightened the desire for political and social change and directed attention and energy towards the 2008 presidential election, which acts in US history as generally a peaceful if hegemonic outlet for social opposition (Gramsci, 1992). The greater participation of usually more disinterested youth in the primaries is one noticeable outcome of unease about the future.

The campaign also comes after hotly contested Presidential elections in 2000 and 2004, which the Republicans won<sup>4</sup> by only slight margins in the key swing states of Florida and Ohio. As with the previous two elections, many feel the 2008 election will once again be decided by self-defined independents, who make up roughly 30% of the population. Choosing a candidate who appeals to these voters can influence primary voters' choice and the discourse of candidates. An example is George Bush's call for "compassionate conservatism" in 2000, which was intended to win over independent voters who did not support either a strong social-conservative or Darwinian neo-liberal economic agenda. This may also be the reason for the choice of John McCain as the Republican candidate in this election. He is seen as more independent and has at times distanced himself from the highly unpopular Bush administration.

Democratic party members proportionally tend to be members of minority groups, women, socially progressive urbanites, and non-Christian whites. Demographic changes have seen an increase in the number of these voters, especially those from ethnic minority groups (Bowers, 2008). At the same time, there has been a decline in the percentage of White Christian voters. These voters, labeled the Christian Right, make up the core of the Republican Party and are inclined to vote more on social issues, such a same-sex marriage<sup>3</sup> or abortion rights, rather than along class lines.

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<sup>3</sup> "CBS Poll: 81% Say U.S. On Wrong Track," CBS, April 3, 2008  
(<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/04/03/opinion/polls/main3992628.shtml>)

<sup>4</sup> In fact, these election results are still disputed because of voting irregularities and ballot accountability problems.

It, too, should be noted that in the US usually only around 50% of eligible voters actually cast a ballot, and traditionally about 30% of Americans are not registered to vote in presidential elections, with the working poor accounting for roughly two-thirds of this figure. One reason is people with lower incomes change jobs and residence more frequently so registration procedures prove difficult. There are also efforts by Republican supporters to place barriers to registration fearing greater Democratic Party support. The result is that the concerns of poor Americans are not usually voiced in campaign discourse and policy, which reinforces a belief that their vote doesn't count. When John Edwards made addressing poverty a central part of his campaign he was quickly marginalized. Conversely, the number, the spending and the influence of federal lobbyists representing corporations and industrial organizations has never been greater in US politics.<sup>5</sup> Nor has the amount of money spent on campaign events and advertising, which will reach into the billions all told.

A growing percentage of the population has grown up in a media-saturated consumer society where the lines between politics and pop-culture, long traversed, are today nearly erased (Van Zoonen (2000)). Pop-culture becomes a resource and a platform for politician's political communication. Spots on late-night TV and comedy shows are now a must for the candidate. At the same time, people are more in tune with interactive media and express their identity through social networking and video sharing internet sites, with some content clearly political.

The US populous also lives in more pluralistic cities and towns and worship sports heroes and music or film icons of all races, which has created greater tolerance, if not actually more friendships across perceived racial boundaries. It is reported that even younger Christians have become more accepting of ethno-cultural differences than their parents or grandparents and diverge from elder generations on social issues.<sup>6</sup>

Another electorally significant trend is the growth in popularity of conservative and now liberal talk radio host and the countless TV and cable news show political pundits. More than regular news, they focus on elections and national politics.

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<sup>5</sup> For detailed information on the spending by lobby groups, see OpenSecrets.org. Center for Responsive Politics: Lobbying Database <<http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/index.php>>

<sup>6</sup> For detail, see the results of a survey on the faith and political views of young adults in the 2008 election cycle at the Faith in Public Life website <<http://faithinpubliclife.org/content/faps/>>

These commentators, often highly partisan and agenda oriented, can determine political talking points, sway public opinion and impact the content of campaign speeches.<sup>7</sup>

### III Primary Campaign Context

Within the broader context outlined above, the more specific context of the campaign must be underlined for its impact on the South Carolina speech event. Obama's campaign is particularly intriguing. He came to national attention when he gave a well-received speech at the 2004 Democratic nomination. At that time, many pegged him as a rising star in the party and possible future leader, but his decision to enter the 2008 race was a surprise. Many argued he was too young and inexperienced at this time as he has only been in the Senate for 4 years and from the beginning he was considered a long-shot, even down 33 points in one national poll (Paulson, 2008). He is an African American in a nation with a long history of racial injustice, who spent some of his youth overseas and in addition has a "foreign" sounding name, the middle one, Hussein, not exactly connotatively favourable among some segments of the US population post 9/11. He also had a much lower profile than several of his primary opponents, especially John Edwards, who ran for VP on the Democratic ticket in 2004, and the early front-runner, Hillary Clinton, who with the support of many party heavy-weights (appointed delegates) looked to have the election wrapped up even before the primary season began.

To overcome these odds, he and his team built a well-run campaign that effectively used the Web, text-messaging and other social media to spread their message, mobilize and empower supporters and gain financial support (Shepard, 2008). The campaign mixed new media marketing methods with more traditional grassroots campaigning (Shotline Press, 2008) to network volunteers and target most likely voters. Writes Illana Bryant of Adweek:

The Obama brand is led from the bottom up, not the top down. The campaign has a social-networking site with powerful, instant peer-to-peer communication. With features like "create your own event" and "create your

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<sup>7</sup> For detail, see a report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism on the State of the News Media in America: Radio <[http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2008/narrative\\_yearinnews\\_radio.php?cat=5&media=2](http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2008/narrative_yearinnews_radio.php?cat=5&media=2)>

own Obama group,” the campaign has created a self-organizing system. Obama HQ provides the tools for these people to meet, organize, fund-raise and canvass voters, but does not dictate the content or intervene with the peer groups (2008).

This use of new media was an especially effective method of mobilizing younger voters. Yet it also reveals that political enablement and participation today is paradoxically tied to the disempowering force of corporate capitalism’s commodities and marketing strategies.

Obama’s team also used a comprehensive approach, targeting even small caucus states, such as Iowa, where he had his first surprise win. This victory signaled he was a legitimate contender and that other candidates, especially Clinton, had taken his challenge too lightly (Epstein, 2008). It also showed he had strength in a so-called “white”, rural state, and that his message of hope and change especially resonated with under 30 and white-collar “liberal” voters, who came out in much larger numbers than normal to support him (Talev, 2008). These two groups of voters, part of the “progressive” wing of the Democratic Party, also favoured Obama for his stated opposition to the occupation of Iraq, which both Clinton and Edwards voted for.

Identity politics also played an important role. The question of who better represented women or a specific ethnic group kept surfacing in the media and the campaigns despite the efforts of candidates to build a broader coalition of support. Obama campaigned on what some have called a “post-racial” platform (Schorr, 2008). In his associations, message and style he purposefully avoided branding himself as the Black or minority candidate, in the mold of a civil rights leader such as Jesse Jackson. Rather, highlighting his mixed heritage, he tried to present himself as the face of a more tolerant, less racially divided America, which again appealed to younger, more progressive and independent voters. This strategy worked in the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries, but in South Carolina, with its larger African American Democratic voter base, Obama was not generating the same enthusiasm, as many African American voters retained strong feelings of affiliation for Bill Clinton and by association, Hillary. That was until Hillary Clinton appeared to minimize Dr. Martin Luther King’s role in enacting important civil rights legislation and before President Bill Clinton, campaigning for his wife, suggested Hillary might lose the contest because Black voters will choose Obama.



This and other critical comments towards Obama appeared patronizing and divisive to African-Americans, who then turned away from Hillary Clinton (Robinson, 2008). Bill Clinton's dismissive comments after the primary, that Jesse Jackson had also won South Carolina in '84 and '88, further appeared to marginalize Obama and in so doing, infuriated African-American community leaders, who began to endorse Obama in greater number.

#### IV Critical Discourse Analysis of South Carolina Speech

Writing about “how Obama won the Democratic nomination”, Scott Shepard notes that a model for presidential politics is just that “without an inspiring candidate, a message that resonates, a coherent strategy, the ability to raise money and a little luck...” (2008). Indeed, no one element is sufficient to win such a long and difficult election campaign. What follows, though, will be a closer examination of Obama's message, as presented in his South Carolina primary victory speech. Here we want to focus on genre, the textual ways of acting.

Genre can be viewed as social action (Millar, 1984) as it provides a familiar form that enables meaningful and purposeful interaction in social events (Fairclough, 2003). In the social practice of electioneering, the campaign speech is a more “disembedded” genre that includes situated speech genres such as historically notable nomination speeches, longer policy speeches and everyday stump speeches.

The primary victory speech is similar to a stump speech in function, but one that plays to a national audience and has a more momentous tone. It's purpose is to celebrate the efforts of local supporters, introduce the candidate in person, outline his or her views, generate more enthusiasm for the campaign, respond to attacks by opponents and pundits and to events in the news and to ask, of course, for further donations and votes. The victory speech includes the ongoing themes of stump speeches, which get added to and subtracted from over the course of the campaign.

Though the term “stump speech” comes from the logs politicians of old stood on in more informal settings, today they are more crafted affairs, that may include teleprompters and a planted demographically diversified audience behind the speaker for TV and video consumption. Obama's primary victory speech in South Carolina included both. This kind of speech has common features with most single

speaker political oration, particularly its use of persuasive rhetorical tropes and the foregrounding of personal performance; however, its contemporary form is far less ornamental with less lexical range than classical political speeches or even those of someone like Churchill during the pre-television modern period. Lance Morrow notes that stump speeches now are written for TV news sound bites and forego any pretense of following the traditional Ciceronian formula. He suggests this art of persuasion has become somewhat of an industrial affair that may give way to machines. Rather, in the case of Obama at least, I would argue it has become more of a pop-culture affair. That is, to help build his brand image and appeal, his speech art derives some of its finesse from TV advertising and the influence of marketing and plays off lines and narratives from movies, both genres to which his audience is attuned. To assist in this effort, his campaign hired a prominent New York advertising agency that could work with non-traditional marketing (Teinowitz & Creamer, 2007). While Obama is not the first candidate to use advertising agencies, with his personal appeal, message, speeches, slogans logos, and web designs all tightly packaged together, Romano (2008) suggests, “Obama is the first presidential candidate to be marketed like a high-end consumer brand.” This fits with Wernick’s notion of ‘promotional culture’ (noted in Fairclough, pp.112, 2003). This speech also mixes in some black oratory traditions, arguably to gently reaffirm his heritage at a time the African-American vote was still up for grabs.

While a campaign speech is clearly a persuasive text type, and might be classified as argumentative, Obama’s SC speech employs more of a narrative mode. Narrative plays an important role in the construction of social relations and meaning and narrative texts are pervasive in today’s intensive, multi-mediated culture. The persuasive function of campaign speech favours their transformative capacity. The challenge is how to transport the audience into the story so they become emotionally engaged and more willing to dispel disbelief and accept the descriptions and prescriptions presented by the speaker as natural. Familiarity offers one path and, as its overarching narrative, Obama’s SC speech provides this by employing the heroic journey theme central to many mythic stories and popular Hollywood films, such as Star Wars or Lord of the Rings.<sup>8</sup> This journey is

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<sup>8</sup> Someone took this relationship to heart when they made a mash-up video blending the Obama story and Star Wars. See it here: <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/05/02/obama-mashup-the-empire-s\\_n\\_99827.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/05/02/obama-mashup-the-empire-s_n_99827.html)>

presented as one of fabulous struggle and triumph: “After four great contests in every corner of this country...,” and “The change we seek has always required great struggle and sacrifice.” The trek itself is expansive and arduous, hinting back to the historic quests of explorers told in schoolbooks: “...from the snows of Iowa ...to the hills of New Hampshire; from the Nevada desert to the South Carolina coast.”

The beginning sets the scene: this victory and the one in Iowa proves “that our time for change has come”, but “that the kind of change we seek will not come easy.” The second part reveals the obstacles that must be overcome, such as “big money influence in Washington”, “a racial divide”, and “decades of bitter partisanship in Washington”, and reminds the listener of the journey’s purpose and who the hero is trying to save. It concludes with small tales of hope, a rallying cry to fight to the end “while we breathe, we hope”, and a resumption of the journey “with a new wind at our backs”.

Obama personal narrative makes for a likeable hero of the people, again someone familiar we might identify with. He has clean-cut, boyish good looks, humble roots, a mixed heritage, he overcame socio-cultural barriers and studied hard to attend a prestigious university only to give up greater financial rewards to work as a community organizer, he spoke out against the grain on the Iraq invasion, and so on the official story goes. But in the SC victory speech, the humble hero draws attention to his fellowship of supporters with the choice of inclusive pronominals ‘we’, ‘our’, and ‘us’. These also help transport the audience and transform the social relation to one of apparent equals. His cause is their cause. His triumph is their triumph. His heroism is their heroism. Coercion becomes complicity as this rhetorical slight-of-hand hides the fact that while Obama will eventually go on to the White House, to decide on matters of global significance, most supporters outside the halls of power will return to their rented apartments or mortgaged houses, their insecure jobs and their regular lives, again cut off from the civic decisions that affect them. There are, too, the voiceless, and impoverished, whose stories aren’t mentioned, who live in homeless shelters and parks at the margins of the global economy.

The speech also explicitly foregrounds its narrative style by presenting moving, personal “stories and voices” of what seems to be composite characters, in whom the audience might find familiar aspects of themselves or acquaintances. Examples

include the mother without family medical insurance, the double-shifting teacher, and the laid-off father competing with his son for a low-paying service sector job. While these narratives focus on class-based identity and experience, the speech does not use the politically sensitive language of socialist movements. Nor does it highlight the role of the owners of capital in these characters' plight. For example, in the case of the out of work father, using a metonym, the executive who made the decision to end operations is substituted for a building, so we hear "the factory shut its doors". The villains in these personal portrayals and speech narrative mostly remain faceless: "the status quo" "cynics" "a politics" "forces" "habits" or they are today's accepted scoundrels: "politicians in Washington" and "lobbyists". There is no mention of his rival Hillary Clinton, top politician George Bush, conservative talk-show hosts or the head of a corporation. This allows the listener to inset the wrongdoer of his or her choice, which limits disagreement and encourages unity with the speaker. It also permits Obama to claim the political and ethical high-ground and avoid directly offending wealthy donors to and influential supporters of his campaign.

Through code words and antithetical descriptions, Obama invokes several familiar mythic US meta-narratives as well, which tap into strongly held values and pull at emotional longings, particularly of people belonging to the Democratic Party. They are: that change and something new is improved or progress; that the people have sovereign will and it can be realized through participation in the nation's electoral process; that the religious and racial divide can be overcome and the nation united under one proud flag—out of many, we are one<sup>9</sup>; and that there is a higher purpose in life, which includes a moral duty to seek social justice.

In addition to the heroic journey narrative, some of his lines from the SC speech have a familiar ring to them, reflecting its pop-cultural feel, though this is not to suggest intentional intertextual reference. "Yes, we can seize our future" brings to mind the line "Seize the days, boys!" from the movie *The Dead Poets Society*. "We are not going to let them stand in our way any more" sound somewhat like Howard Beale's proclamation in the movie *Network* "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore." Finally, the affirmative slogan "Yes, we can," has

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<sup>9</sup> E pluribus unum or "out of many, one" appears on the Seal of the United States and is printed on most currency. It signifies the union of states and colonies or the so-called melting pot of diverse people into one similar group.

been used in the TV show, *Bob the Builder*, in a pop song by the Pointer Sisters, as the rallying cry of the Philadelphia Phillies baseball team in 1974, and by the United Farm Workers (Tilove, 2008). Furthermore, the speech employs repetition and parallelism. This symmetry produces the kind of lyricism found in music. “It was written like a song, but not performed like a song,” notes Lieberman (cited in Chang, 2008). Yet there is a rhythm to his oration. Writes Nunberg, “He’s mastered a certain cadence that’s very effective. He turns to the right to make his first point with a rise, then he turns to his left with a fall to close” (cited in Chang, 2008).

We should note that use of narrative is a growing trend in marketing circles, especially those developing commonality with their customers (Learned, 2007). Obama’s speech achieves this and it also uses other marketing methods to build brand involvement. His suggestive language facilitates alignment with his perspective and invites the listener to evangelize: “That is the country I see. That is the country you see. But now it is up to us to help the entire nation embrace this vision.” Here we see a plug for a political marketing technique Jean Fleming (2008) advises, which is to “unleash your customers” productive urge and embrace “user-generated content,” such as the Obama Girl phenom and the Yes, We Can Song discussed more below, which has been view over 10 million times on Youtube.

TV advertising influences are noticeable in his use of “sound bites” and sloganizing, which play to an audience raised on snappy lines from commercials. “Change we can believe in,” “Stand for Change,” “Yes, we can,” and “It’s about the past versus the future” are a few of his most popular slogans. “Yes, we can” is particularly effective as it affirms Obama as an agent of change, his vision of America, and equally the audience’s role in this. Illana Bryant, on grassroots marketing calls that “leveraging the power of inspiration.” She writes that this phrase and others “epitomize the Obama brand values and speak positively to the subconscious in a way that would make NLP (Neuro-linguistic Programming) practitioners proud” (2008).

The influence of brand marketing is also noticeable in the way Obama seeks to empower, even if the end game is getting him elected to a supreme position of authority. As mentioned, his pronominal choice is “we” over “I” and “us” over “me”. For example, he changes the South Carolina state motto from “While I Breathe, I Hope” to “That while we breathe, we will hope.” And there are his lines “Change in America doesn’t start from the top down. It starts from the bottom up.” Or

“We are the change we’ve been looking for. Change can’t happen without you.” This fits with more recent marketing trends that focus on the consumer rather than the product: who you can become if you purchase the commodity. Here new media play an important role because of their interactive quality. In discussing the differences between Hillary Clinton’s and Barack Obama’s approach, Leonard writes:

Traditional media is based on command and control. But the digital world is all about grassroots. Traditional media is about authority. Digital is about authenticity. You can see it in the language they use. Obama uses the language of “we and you,” which is inclusive and nods to the wisdom of the crowds. She uses “I and me.” His stuff is about “yes, you can.” Which is about the buyer. She talks about “experience from day one.” That’s about the seller. That doesn’t resonate anymore (2008).

Obama’s primary campaign speeches also draw on religious rhetoric, from the tradition of Martin Luther King, especially in its social gospel message (Hagerty, 2008). But they blend concern for the poor with personal transformation of one’s soul, which is more of a New Age concern that attracts progressives. This multi-directional message, in his New Hampshire primary concession speech inspired will.i.am, a member of the band Black Eyed Peas, to create a well-received song and music video “Yes We Can Song” based on lines from the speech. He explained, the speech “inspired me to look inside myself and outwards towards the world... it inspired me to want to change myself to better the world...”<sup>10</sup>

In the SC speech we see the outward concern when in talking about health care, schooling and wages Obama says “there are people all across this country who are counting on us...” and the inward focus when he reflects “we are also struggling against our own doubts, our own fears, and our own cynicism.... It is a battle in our own hearts and minds...” He also includes religious code words when he suggests his campaign of change is “a higher purpose,” that people are “ready to believe again” and that politicians “demonize” their opponents.

Moreover, the South Carolina speech event mixes the call-response oratory tradition from the black church sermon, which many of his supporters in the state are well versed in. The audience responds “Yeah” “No” “Right” or “Yes, we

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<sup>10</sup> To read more and watch the video, see <<http://yeswecan.dipdive.com/biography/>>

can” after he keys them up with an interactional cue, such as a pause, a lilt in his intonation or an elongated vowel (Jennifer Jackson, interview in Garber, 2008). As Obama explains about his discourse, “I tap into the tradition that a lot of African-Americans tap into and that’s the church....” (Quoted in Deavere Smith, 2004). Notes Charteris-Black in discussing King’s speeches, “the interaction between speaker and audience gives the speech momentum and a feeling of shared purpose and unity” (pp. 63, 2005). It also gives a more interactive or communicative feel to the event and sense of involvement. The important question is whether this feeling of participation will lead to actual involvement in civic dialogue and the political process.

Metaphors offer another transformative bridge that link participants and experiences in the narrative event. In his study of the function of this rhetorical strategy in political speeches, Charteris-Black identifies the journey metaphor as a preeminent one and he details its occurrence in King’s speeches, which as popular discourse, resonate in Obama and his audience. The path linking the two men in a cause and effect relationship even shows up on the campaign trail on T-shirts as a journey metaphor for the African American struggle for civil rights and social justice: “Rosa Parks sat, so Martin could walk. Martin walked so Obama could run. Obama is running so our children can FLY.” As with King, the journey Obama embodies and speaks of more plainly is not only geographical, but that of a nation seeking to still fulfill the opening statement in the Declaration of Independence. As Charteris-Black argues, the efficacy of this metaphor comes from its rich source domain (our daily commuter experience), and the way it combines with other figures of speech and other metaphors (pp. 197, 2005). In this speech, Obama combines the journey with the politics as battle metaphor, which goes well with a stump speech and the heroic journey narrative. The battle metaphor is enhanced by Obama’s heavy use of contrastive semantic relations between sentences and between longer stretches of text marked by the conjunction “but”. In addition, the conjunctive “so” is combined with “don’t” and repeated after affirmative examples of change to create a defiant causal statement of consequence: “So don’t tell us change isn’t possible,” “So don’t tell us change can’t happen.”

## V Conclusion

As the first elected Black president, Barack Obama's story is a new chapter in American history. Part of the reason for first his primary and then general election victories was the success of his speech events, such as the one in South Carolina, which were unique for the way they blended genre, for their capacity to move the audience and make rather plain words resonate. Analysis here finds that in its use of narrative, reliance on slogans and inclusive prenominals, Obama's South Carolina speech taps into pop-culture genres to effectively transport and persuade the audience that he can lead a movement of the people, for the people by the people to change US politics and the social contract. Though we should not discount the impact on the audience, Obama's reliance on recent marketing techniques and branding, the role of money in his campaign, and the push for discursive legitimacy, suggest that behind the unique story of the first black presidential nominee and his soothing tone is business as usual, and that any real challenge to the status quo of structural inequality and social injustice may be silenced by the sharp voices of hegemony.

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