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The black press as a political institution: how the Chicago Defender portrayed Jesse Jackson and Barack Obama's historical presidential campaigns

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THE BLACK PRESS AS A POLITICAL INSTITUTION:
HOW THE *CHICAGO DEFENDER* PORTRAYED JESSE
JACKSON AND BARACK OBAMA'S HISTORICAL PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduated Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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by
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Abstract

Since the inception of *Freedom's Journal* in 1827, the black press has sought to elevate the black community as well as advocate for civil rights and justice. This thesis examines news coverage in the *Chicago Defender*, a prominent black newspaper that has created a public sphere for the black community. Specifically, this research reveals whether the newspaper framed Reverend Jesse Jackson's 1988 campaign differently from President Barack Obama's 2008 campaign. Furthermore, this thesis sought to reveal how a well-known black newspaper provided meaning for its readers about two black presidential candidates who adopted disparate political messages in order to appeal to American citizens. The thesis utilizes framing theory in order to understand how the newspaper covered Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama, and it employed a qualitative analysis methodology. Discourse analysis—a method that falls under qualitative research—was employed in order to examine words, sentences, phrases and tone. The findings illustrate that the *Defender* attempted to support and elevated Reverend Jackson, but showed skepticism about his ability to win the Democratic presidential nomination. On the contrary, the newspaper overwhelmingly supported Senator Obama, using his candidacy to elevate the black community.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“From the very first time the Afro-American had a right to exercise his freedom in this country, his course with regard to church, state, and society, has been followed with more than ordinary zeal, and his progress in the various pursuits undertaken by him have been noted with an exacting eye, characteristic of the most watchful.”

Garland Penn (1891)

The American Revolution helped to create antislavery sentiments and created efforts to assist African Americans throughout the United States (Bacon, 2007). During the 1780s and 1790s, blacks became more forceful about identity, rights and liberty, “combining honor for their African heritage, affirmation of their status as Americans, and refutations of negative representations of them” (Bacon 2007, p. 17). In 1788, “An Essay on Negro Slavery,” published under the name Othello in the *American Museum*, called for the abolishment of slavery. After the American Revolution, between 1780 and 1800, “a first generation of leaders began to address issues of identity, self-determination and group consciousness” (p. 15). By the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slavery was abolished throughout most of the North in states such as Massachusetts, Vermont and Pennsylvania (p. 14). Several events after the Revolution led to the creation of the black community’s first black newspaper.

Throughout the 1820s, the mainstream press increasingly published highly negative perspectives of blacks, conveying how and what the white community and press thought about the state of black Americans. Mordecai Manual Noah, a playwright, essayist, politician and editor of various New York newspapers, which included the *New-York Enquirer*, wrote several articles that questioned blacks’ intelligence and exaggerated their physical features. In his editorials, Noah supported that free blacks carry free papers (Bacon, 2007, p. 30). Bacon argues

that Noah's influential writings were damaging to blacks and contends that this "atmosphere of the 1820s '[allowed] African American leaders [to see] both a need and an opportunity to create a forum directed and controlled by African Americans that would air their views'" (p. 30). Thus, the black community saw the need to represent themselves within a black public sphere rather than the mainstream public. "The early history of the black press was shaped precisely by the experience of exclusion and the hope of future engagement" (Jacobs, 1999, p. 365).

On March 16, 1827, the first black newspaper *Freedom's Journal* gave blacks an opportunity that had been missing in the mainstream press: to speak for themselves. For the first time African Americans could generate, control and edit their own forum where "African Americans could articulate their concerns...and bring a variety of voices into the civic debates" (Bacon, 2007). The editors Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm declared on March 16, 1827 that blacks could plead their own cause (p. 13). Cornish and Russwurm asserted that the African American community needed a public outlet dedicated to black elevation, pride and self-determination. Two years later in 1828, the newspaper ceased publication, but the black community would not be without a black newspaper for long.

Over the course of the past few centuries, hundreds of black newspapers with similar goals followed *Freedom's Journal*. Although many black newspapers have ceased publication, some newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Baltimore Afro American* have been acclaimed as the most influential in the Black community from World War I to the civil rights movement. Not only have black newspapers sought to provide oppositional perspectives to the mainstream press, they have also operated under different goals. Where the mainstream press seeks to report on public affairs through an objective lens, the black press aims to educate, uplift and elevate the black community. Research indicates that these goals continue to influence how the black press, especially the *Chicago Defender*, covers public affairs.

Therefore, this thesis adds to previous literature that explores how the black press operates and communicates to the black community.

Specifically, this thesis examines one newspaper that continues today to be one of the most prominent black newspapers within the black community. The *Chicago Defender* has a long history of continuous coverage since 1905 and a lasting prominence within the black press, which peaked during the Great Migration, World War II and the Civil Rights Movement, making it one of the most important newspapers presenting an oppositional perspective to the mainstream press (Mastin, Campo & Frazer, 2005; Fraley & Lester-Roushanzamir, 2004). Literature demonstrates that since 1905, the *Defender* provided alternative views about domestic issues, especially the plight of African Americans, foreign relations and political affairs (Beeching, 2002).

The *Defender* was well known for its news, political commentary and editorials about black life in America, but it also created a separate public sphere on the South Side of Chicago designed to provide black citizens with an alternative political arena for them to communicate and engage in political action (Herbst, 1994, p.94). Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine how the *Defender* framed two historical black presidential candidacies, one in 1988 and the other one in 2008. Allen and Bielby (1979) suggest that the mainstream “media have been responsible for heightening social discord in the black community, lowering blacks’ self esteem and teaching blacks to be unrelenting in the quest for equal rights” (p. 488). These authors found that black Americans trusted the black print media more than majority print sources. Thus, this thesis specifically expands on existing literature that examines how black newspapers have communicated with their local communities, essentially developing their own public spheres and public opinion about black issues in America. Jacobs (1999) argues that the development of an independent black press allowed African Americans “to secure a space of self-representation:

not only to craft common identities and solidarities, but also to develop arguments which might effectively engage white civil society” (p. 357). Therefore, the black press created their own alternative space where they promoted black elevation, pride and self-determination as well as alternative views that describe the role of race today in America. Thus, this thesis also determines whether the black press continues to practice these professional goals by analyzing news coverage of two historical black presidential campaigns.

Several African American leaders have run for the Democratic presidential nomination, but only one candidate in 2008, Senator Barack Obama, succeeded in winning. Twelve years before Reverend Jesse Jackson ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988, a black woman ran for presidency. In 1972 Representative Shirley Chisholm of New York, the first black woman elected in to Congress in 1968, sought the Democratic presidential nomination, making it the first time, but not the last time that a black woman would run for the presidency (Paula, Niambi & Michael, 2005; Asante, 2007). Following Reverend Jackson and preceding Senator Obama, Illinois Senator Carol Moseley Braun and the Reverend Al Sharpton of New York—a social and political leader in the black community—ran for the Democratic presidential nomination.

According to the literature, Representative Chisholm’s goal was never to win, but to prove that it was possible for a black woman to “make a good standing in a presidential run” (p.56). The other candidates who came after Chisholm, however, made serious runs with the hopes of winning. Thus, Representative Chisholm’s race for the Democratic nomination for president influenced several more serious black candidates to run for president in a thirty-four-year period. Specifically, this thesis focuses on Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama’s presidential runs. Reverend Jackson’s 1988 presidential bid is significant because he became the first black male to receive a majority vote at the Democratic Nomination Convention. The media

and elites, however, perceived that Senator Obama, who won the presidential seat in November 2008, was the first viable black candidate. One of the main differences between these two candidates—which may have allowed Senator Obama to win in 2008 while Reverend Jackson lost 1984 and 1988—was how each one handled the meaning of race in their campaign messages. The study’s purpose is to understand how a black newspaper like the *Defender* framed two black candidates with very different views about the race issue. I address how the *Defender* created their own public sphere where it engaged in racial discourse with the black community; thus, I address how the *Defender* created meaning about these black candidates.

While thousands of Blacks have won congressional, mayoral, assembly and city council seats, only five blacks have been elected to high profile statewide office and one black politician has won the presidency (Jeffries & Jones, 2006). The historic race of Reverend Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaign in 1988 occurred in a post-civil rights era, twenty years after Rev. Martin Luther King was assassinated. On October 10, 1987, Reverend Jackson announced the beginning of his presidential campaign for the 1988 election in which President Ronald Reagan would exit his position after serving two terms. Reverend Jackson ran in the presidential primaries against Representative Richard Gephardt, Senator Al Gore, and Governor Michael Dukakis, who won the Democratic nomination, but in early 1988, Senator Gary Hart was the front-runner (Tate, 1991). During the primaries Reverend Jackson succeeded in winning thirteen primaries and caucuses, capturing 6.9 million votes (Atwater, 2007). At the Democratic National Convention, which took place in Atlanta, Georgia from July 18 to 21, Reverend Jackson fell in second place after Governor Dukakis. Reverend Jackson’s second attempt to win the presidency signified a major change in America. The reverend was not able to achieve this success in his first presidential bid in 1984; he primarily concentrated on black interests, and a few events like Louis Farrakhan’s endorsement automatically threw him out of the race as a serious candidate. At the

end of the primary season, however, in 1988, Reverend Jackson received a total of 1,218 delegates (McIlwain (2007). His campaign symbolized the progress of black Americans, but also represented a transitional period where race relations in America slowly continued to improve. For many blacks who pursued a political career, however, race still remained a barrier.

Perhaps one of Reverend Jackson's barriers to winning was his skin color, but his campaign message reduced his political influence among blacks and whites as well. Literature that focuses on the effectiveness of the political candidates, specifically minority candidates, demonstrates that message remains a big factor. "Whites have not supported black candidates at the same rate that blacks have supported white candidates" (Jeffries & Jones, 2006, p. 246). Literature shows that a "deracialized political strategy" that "attempts to defuse the divisive effects of race by avoiding references to ethnic or racially construed issues, while at the same time emphasizing those issues that appeal to a wide community, [mobilizes] a large portion of the electorate" (p. 247). Thus, black candidates rely heavily on the white population to win high profile elections. Although Reverend Jackson's message at the DNC in 1988 addressed the significance of the rainbow coalition—which was an attempt to prove that he was not "the black" candidate and to show the public that he was interested in representing all Americans—and attempted to unite people of different backgrounds, his overall campaign message remained tailored to black interests (Atwater, 2007).

Nineteen years later, on February 10, 2007, Senator Barack Obama announced he would be running for the president of the U.S., propelling another historical presidential bid that would last much longer than Reverend Jackson's and become more successful. During 2007 and 2008 Obama ran against the front-runner New York Senator Hillary Clinton, former Senator John Edwards, Governor Bill Richardson and Senator Joe Biden, to name a few. Although Senator Obama's campaign was a significant occurrence for the black community, he was competing for

black votes with a white candidate. In February 2007, Senator Clinton led Senator Obama 41% to 17% among voters over all in a Time/Associated Press poll, according to Walters (2007). By the end of February, however, Senator Clinton's lead dropped to 36%, while Senator Obama increased to 24%. "The shift in ratings among two leaders in February was due largely to the growth of black support for Obama" (p. 8). In the earlier poll, blacks favored Senator Clinton (60%) to Senator Obama (20%). But in the later poll, blacks favored Senator Obama 44% to Senator Clinton's 33%. Thus, "for many Black voters, Obama had begun to prove his Blackness" (p. 8). According to a Gallup poll in September 2008, blacks overwhelmingly supported Senator Obama (93%) compared to the Republican nominee Senator John McCain (3%). Not only did Senator Obama have to prove his "blackness" to black Americans, but he also had to adopt a "deracialized" strategy to help him obtain white votes as well. According to the same Gallup poll in September 2008, Senator McCain led Senator Obama in support among white voters, 51% to 42%. Thus, Senator Obama and Reverend Jackson represented what scholars have called a "double bind" in which they had to carefully move between white and black voters in order to succeed. Thus, I also address how the black press responded to this "double bind" where Senator Obama and Reverend Jackson had to reach out to black and white voters.

In August 2008, twenty years after Reverend Jackson's historic race for president, Senator Obama succeeded in winning the Democratic nomination. Although Senator Obama is a biracial candidate, the political community labeled him as the first viable black presidential contender during the primary elections in 2008. Senator Obama, however, "stands on the shoulders of other African Americans that ran for office of the president, starting with Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm in 1972, Reverend Jesse Jackson, Carol Mosely Braun, Al Sharpton and Alan Keyes" (Walter, 2007, p. 121). Senator Obama—who was born to a white mother and Kenyan father—does not share with civil rights leaders, such as Reverend Jackson,

similar political experiences. His message differs in that he has concentrated on a rhetoric of hope and change, which may be “defined as a rhetoric of new politics,” and a message of the true “American story” (p. 122).

This thesis seeks to compare news coverage of Senator Obama and Reverend Jackson in the *Chicago Defender*, an important media source for black Americans. Literature has solely addressed how the black press frames social leaders, such as those from the black power movement during the 1960s, but not political leaders (Fraley & Lester-Roushanzamir’s, 2004). Research also demonstrates that the black press has historically served as an active voice in the black community, providing oppositional perspectives about racial issues compared to the mainstream press (Huspek, 2004; Mastin, Campo & Frazer, 2005). Thus, the thesis seeks to uncover prominent news frames of Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama’s campaign messages in the *Chicago Defender* and attempts to answer how the newspaper framed two minority candidates running in high profile elections twenty years apart. This thesis is significant because it attempts to answer how a prominent black newspaper, such as the *Chicago Defender*, created meaning for the black community about two critical presidential elections. I asked whether the race of these candidates played a significant role in their news coverage. Overall, it is important to understand how the *Chicago Defender*, which has acted as a political institution for black Americans since 1905, has maintained a black agenda for minorities to follow rather than a mainstream agenda.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

History of the Black Press

“The publicity strategies of marginalized groups cannot concentrate solely on ‘mainstream’ media and dominant publics, but must also include active participation in, and cultivation of, alternative public spheres” (Jacobs, 1999, p. 365). These publics offer a place for a group to counteract “the effects of hegemony” by developing alternative “narratives that contain different heroes and different plots” (p. 365). Since the inception of *Freedom’s Journal*, black newspapers have accomplished creating new spaces and publics where black Americans have engaged in an alternative environment. According to Jacobs, Frederick Douglass, one of the most influential black journalists, argued that if free blacks created successful public institutions, they would reach whites who were outside of black spaces. The black press adopted a dual role where it provided the community with a forum for debate and self-improvement, while attempting to increase black visibility in white society; this dual role is similar to what Jackson and Obama did in their presidential bids where they attempted to reach both black and white voters. These public spaces, however, also allowed black newspapers to “articulate Black identity through the language of race, community, and the so-called Black neighborhood” (Heinz, 2005, p. 54). Thus, from the beginning of the black press, creating an alternative public sphere allowed them to present an alternative voice to the black community.

During the 1820s, black Americans began pursuing their own agendas. *Freedom’s Journal* resulted from an intense community development for black Americans (Bacon 2007). Bacon argues that the editors of this newspaper emphasized black self-determination and collective identity rather than white racism; therefore, the editors were more concerned with black issues rather than the attacks of others. Bacon found that the newspaper “depended

fundamentally on the sense of community, the drive for education, the recognition of the power of the press, and the emphasis on rhetoric and self determination that had been nurtured by generations of African Americans prior to its publication” (p. 43). *Freedom’s Journal* was not abolitionist newspaper; rather, it served as a tool for elevating the black community.

Nevertheless, it was the institution of slavery that had caused black men and women to protest in writing (Tinney, 1980). Tinney argues that the black press became a black political institution that addressed the “distribution of power ‘and advantages and disadvantages among people’” (p. 1). Therefore, the *Journal* marked the development of a political tool concerned with publicizing the black voice.

Hutton (2004) discusses how the black press was concerned with messages of social morality, traditionally following the spirit of American democracy, gentility and elevation throughout the pre-Civil War period. Previous literature indicates that abolitionist messages were a major concern of the early black press; however, these newspapers were also interested in uplifting free black men and women (Hutton, 1993). The black press was not only intended for a small black middle class, but also for those aspiring to the middle class, according to Hutton (2004). Hutton also points out that the black press attempted to show white readers that free men and women were “conscientious, upwardly mobile and in need of their votes of confidence” (p. 71). Thus, Hutton addresses how the black press not only carved out their own public sphere, but also established one for whites to see different perspectives of black Americans. One of the early black newspapers’ messages was the inclusion of black Americans into the mainstream public. Hutton describes the early black press as “a push for complete temperance and debt avoidance, messages of social morality in the black press [that] were absolutely essential in the quest for vindication and uplift of the race” (p. 82).

Some research, however, indicates that other black newspapers attempted to elevate the black community while also addressing civil rights and black identity. Black newspapers in the post-bellum era diverged from the ante-bellum newspapers with the abolition of slavery. Political interests replaced racial uplift messages (Finkle, 1975). Cronin (2006) examines “one of the South’s most prominent, eloquent and activist publishers,” C.F. Richardson and his black newspaper *Houston Informer* during the 1920s. Cronin argues that Richardson weaved three strains of black thought, including “Garvey’s black pride rhetoric, the Du Boisian activist vision of civil rights and Booker T. Washington’s promotion of uplift,” into the news content of the *Informer* (p. 79).

Not only did black newspapers address the black experience in America, but they also wrote about foreign relations, supporting all people of color around the world. With the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934, the black press responded by connecting the plight of black Americans to the struggles of oppressed people throughout the world (Suggs, 1988). In an editorial in the *Chicago Defender*, the writer compared the conditions in Haiti with the violent environment of the American South, according to Suggs. Like the editors of the *Chicago Defender*, Jacques Garvey, Marcus Garvey’s wife, who was a writer and editor for the *Negro World* during the 1920s, sought to “wage a campaign aimed at elevating blacks worldwide” (Broussard, 2006, p. 87). She consistently reported about race relations, addressing issues such as British control in the West Indies, according to Broussard. Thus, literature indicates that the black press has not been monolithic; different newspapers have focused on disparate messages. While some newspapers were more concerned with elevation, others offered militant messages.

After the Civil War, the number of black newspapers increased dramatically (Stevens & Johnson, 1990). One reason for this growth was migration during the 1880s; Black increasingly left the South and moved northward toward expanding industrial urban cities, helping to provide

a large black population that would support black newspapers, according to Stevens and Johnson. Between 1910 and 1930, approximately two million black Americans migrated to the North (Davis, 2001). These authors examined how a black newspaper in the late 19th century served as an instrument for political communication for black leaders across the country, finding that the black press became an institution forming and reflecting the values of the black community. Mangun (2006) analyzed the black newspaper *The Advocate*, which was founded in Portland, Oregon. She writes that for “thirty years, African Americans in Portland, Oregon, relied on the four-page newspaper for national and local news, birth and death announcements, hotel and society news, and general “good news about ‘the race” (p. 8). Like Hutton (1993), Mangun also illustrates how the black press emphasized black achievements and rejected the myth that depicted Blacks as not contributing to society. Stevens and Johnson, however, found that the *Cleveland Gazette*, a black newspaper in Ohio during the 1880s, focused on obtaining equality and justice and rejected racial pride, solidarity and self-help. Thus, the *Cleveland Gazette* focused on providing their readers with a more militant and political perspective than earlier newspapers that promoted elevation and racial pride.

According to Finkle (1975), by the end of the 19th century, black newspapers became “battlefields for the ideological struggles being waged among the various spokesman for the race” (p. 31). With the emergence of the modern black press, which grew after the migration to the North, and an elite readership, black newspapers began publishing front-page news of crime, brutality and discrimination, according to Finkle. During World War I and World War II, the black press faced a dilemma in which it had to “enable the papers to continue their protest function and at the same time convince the race that a total commitment to participate fully in the war effort was the path toward eventual equality” (p. 108). Some research, however, indicates that early black newspapers were commercially successful more than these later ones, despite the

shift to more radical messages (Klassen & Johnson, 1985). Thus, the early black press may have been more influential when they were advocating self-determination, elevation and social morality.

In the early 1900s, 50,000 blacks moved to Chicago from southern states to look for better employment while escaping from the violent and racist environment of the South (Herbst, 1994). According to Armistead Pride (1997), the *Defender* was responsible for this migration, assisting black Americans find housing and employment; thus, the newspaper was an influential source for many black citizens. By the 1930s, blacks lived mostly in certain areas of the city, mainly in the South Side. Here blacks created their own businesses, social clubs, churches and political institutions. According to Herbst, black leaders built an influential political machine in the South Side in the 1920s, but residents turned to other political advocates like Robert Abbot, the editor of the *Chicago Defender*. According to Tinney and Rector (1980), modern black journalism began with Robert S. Abbot when he founded the *Defender*. They contend that this newspaper “brought to black journalism the sensational headlines on stories of crime and scandal, while campaigning against prostitution, supporting the U.S. in World War I and campaigning for the rights of black men” (p. 21). In 1910, the *Defender* “ushered in a new stage in circulation and commercialism” and “published advertisements came after the migrations of 1915” (p. 19). The *Defender* was the first black paper to attain commercial success, and in 1916, the *Defender* was being sold in 71 cities; by 1921, 2,359 agents distributed it across the nation (Davis, 2001; Fitzgerald, 1999). By 1925, the newspaper’s circulation was approximately 200,000 (p. 68). Thus, the *Defender* played a major role as a political institution that provided the black community with an alternative public sphere. The circulation of the newspaper, however, has changed dramatically since its early years. In 2006, the newspaper’s circulation ranged from 14,000 to 16,000 (Mullman, 2006). The *Defender*’s circulation significantly declined after the

1960s, but it continues to distribute news to the black community in Illinois. In 2008, the *Defender* distributed its publications to 729 locations, according to the newspaper's website; the newspaper reached black Americans outside of Chicago, potentially having a major impact on public opinion within the black community beyond the city. While the *Defender* does not boast the same success as it did during the 1920s and 1960s, the newspaper has maintained its reputation of being an important news source for the black community in Chicago and beyond.

Previous literature demonstrates how influential the *Defender* has been in correcting misrepresentations of black Americans in the mainstream press. For example, Spratt, Bullock and Baldasty (2007) examined the news coverage of the Emmett Louis Till case—which involved the murder of a young black male from Chicago for speaking or whistling to a white woman in Mississippi—in 1955 in four black and mainstream newspapers, including the *Chicago Defender*. They found that the *Defender* portrayed Till as an innocent young male and connected this case to the broader issue of “white racism and oppression” (p. 184). The authors conclude that the *Defender* provided different frames than the mainstream newspapers and advocated for justice in the Till case. Beeching (2002), however, found that not all black newspapers covered the same issues. The author examined coverage in eight black newspapers about the rejection of Paul Robeson's passport in 1950. Robeson was a public figure who had promoted civil rights and spoke out against lynching, fascism and colonialism. He found that only the *Baltimore Afro-American* defended Robeson, while other black newspapers paid little attention to the case. Again, since its inception, the black press has not represented a monolithic institution.

The creation of the Black Panther newspaper in the 1960s, however, provided a view significantly different from many other black newspapers. Rhodes (2001) argues that the original newspaper was the most visible and consistent representation of the Black Panthers organization.

The newspaper appeared in 1967 and was part of a “surge of ‘underground’, politically influenced periodicals published during the 1960s including the Nation of Islam’s *Muhammad Speaks* (founded by Malcolm X in 1960), and the student-run Los Angeles *Free Press* (1964) and Berkely Barb (1965)” (p. 152). The editors presented the newspaper as a propaganda tool, which focused on political education and the recruitment of followers. Rhodes contends the newspaper was the vehicle for a nationalist language and culture that rejected white authority. Poindexter and Stroman (1980), however, suggest that an objective, neutral tone began replacing the protest stance during the 1970s in the *New York Amsterdam News*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, the *Atlanta Daily World* and the *Chicago Defender*. Therefore, research indicates that the black press served their communities as alternative political institutions adopting different messages and goals from the pre-Civil War period to the Civil Rights Movement.

Recent Coverage in the Black Press

In more recent years, scholars have studied how the black press, especially the *Chicago Defender*, has covered minority figures or black issues. Literature has focused on comparing how the mainstream and the black press frame minority political leaders. Mastin, Campo and Frazer (2005) noted that objectivity is less of a goal than advocacy and activism for black newspapers. The black press has “promoted a goal to educate and mobilize the Black community” (p. 216). Thus, media images in black newspapers are fundamentally different in black newspapers compared to the mainstream press. For example, Fraley and Lester-Roushanzamir’s (2004) findings suggest that *The Chicago Defender* responded to the death of Fred Hampton, a leader of the Black Panthers, with an oppositional view compared to the mainstream newspaper *The Chicago Tribune*. The *Chicago Tribune* framed the incident using a moral panic theme, emphasizing threats to values and traditions, while in mainstream coverage “the Panthers were no longer a progressive political organization calling for an end to a racist, class-based society,

but thugs with the capacity to incite incredible damage” (p. 156). In contrast to the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Defender* responded to the incident with an alternative view that addressed the power of authorities, presenting “a voice for those absent from mainstream reports” (p. 160). Heinz (2005) examined news coverage of environmental racism in three black newspapers, including the *Chicago Defender*, and found that coverage presented a sense of unity among African Americans, addressing the “Black community.” The newspapers, especially the *Chicago Defender*, developed this unity by connecting environmental justice with other issues affecting black Americans.

Huspek (2004) argues that the Black press stands as an alternative to the mainstream press. The Black press uses a “distinctive use of narrative, myth, and other discursive forms, where difference is expressed within a larger geography of communicative space” (p.218). The author asserts that alternative views in the Black press do not receive recognition in the mainstream press, and finds that the Black press produced oppositional meanings in news coverage about police brutality compared to mainstream newspapers. He argues that “three and one-half decades after the Kerner Report, black issues in mainstream coverage are still reported and written about from the standpoint of the white man’s world” (p.233). According to the article, the mainstream press perpetuates certain racial prejudices about black activists such as Reverend Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton.

Thus, the current news coverage of the black press indicates that black newspapers have continued to pursue their goals of political advocacy, black elevation, pride and education. Scholars, however, have not looked at how the black press has framed black politicians. Therefore, it is also important to see if the black press has framed black political candidates in similar ways as social leaders. While some research has indicated that the mainstream press has covered black social and political figures more negatively than the black media, this thesis seeks

to understand how the *Chicago Defender* framed two black presidential candidates who represented two different generations of black politics and held dissimilar political strategies. The next section reviews how black politicians overall have adopted different political messages.

Black Politics and Minority Campaigns

According to Bositis (2007), the history of black politics began with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and since the civil rights movement black political leaders have increasingly entered the federal, state and local levels of government; giving rise to a black political power (Bositis, 2007). Today, over 9,000 elected officials, who are mostly from the South, are black and former U.S. State Senator of Illinois Barack Obama won the presidency in 2008 (Henry, 2008). Following the Voting Rights Act, many black leaders have largely focused on their political careers in urban cities of the United States. Black political power and influence, however, continues to be limited (Bositis, 2007, p. 223). This small amount of influence may result from a “generation gap between younger and older blacks where young black adults have different political views than their parents and grandparents, which dilutes the strength of the influence blacks can wield” (p. 223). Walter (2007), however, contends that the black community has relied on civil rights and political leaders to vet anyone who asks for its support. Thus, the older generation has largely maintained the position of accepting or rejecting politicians who address the black community.

Media began focusing on the elections of black mayors beginning with Carl Stokes in Cleveland in 1967 (Henry, 2008). In many of these big-city elections, black candidates have depended on a big turnout among black voters to counteract white citizens. Black urban leadership began to change when whites moved to suburbs and “black-on-black” campaigns began emerging in inner cities (p. 4). In elections where blacks were minorities and whites were the majority, however, black candidates began developing “deracialized” campaigns, which

departed from the “insurgent campaign strategy used by the first generation of black mayoral candidates” (p.4). This deracialized strategy included the promotion of “no threatening” images, the avoidance of racially divisive issues and the use of “aggressive grassroots mobilization efforts” (p.4).

Walters (2007) argues that political accountability is used among black political leaders to ensure that politicians raise issues relevant to the black community in exchange for black votes. Walters contends that “political blackness,” which he defines as the extent to which politicians represent black interests culturally and politically, is important for black politicians to succeed. Some research suggests, however, that deracialized political strategies are more effective. Harris-Lacewell and Junn (2007) examined Alan Keyes and Senator Obama’s race for the Illinois State Senate seat. While Senator Obama adopted a deracialized strategy, Keyes discussed his political views through the context of race; he advocated for reparations for American slavery and supported his antiabortion stance by claiming that abortion was racial genocide. Keyes “uses a rhetorical style far more consistent with Black political leaders from Black church traditions” and “is the descendant of Africans enslaved in the American South, whereas Senator Obama is the child of a White woman and an African immigrant” (p. 40). Still, voters embraced Senator Obama as their candidate, according to Harris-Lacewell and Junn. The authors analyzed data from embedded experiments in a survey of black and white voters in Illinois and examined how certain stimuli framed the candidates by race and religion. They studied how those treatments produced racial group consciousness among voters. Black voters perceived Senator Obama more positively when he was portrayed as a multiracial candidate than when he represented a black candidate, according to Harris-Lacewell and Junn. White and black voters were attracted to Senator Obama when portrayed as a multiracial candidate with a deracialized political view. Therefore, research demonstrates that black politicians must continue

to serve their base while reaching out to white voters simultaneously. Research still indicates, however, that white voters are less likely to perceive black candidates as strong leaders (McIlwain, 2007). Entman and Rojecki (2002) argue that news coverage “may foster misrepresentations and even demonization of Black politics [and] set limits on White understanding” (p.125). For minority candidates, race and message have been two critical components affecting their chances of winning an election.

Candidates’ Message

Farrakhan’s endorsement of Jesse Jackson during Jackson’s presidential candidacy in 1984 led to a specific reaction in the old White political establishment, according to Entman and Rojecki. Because of Farrakhan’s extremist image and his past message about black separatism, anti-Semitism and white hatred, the media easily linked Jackson to Farrakhan’s “inflammatory rhetoric.” As a result, news coverage presented Jackson in connection with “threatening” images. Farrakhan’s link to Reverend Jackson reinforced a homogeneous representation of the Black population, therefore, increasing animosity toward Blacks overall. Thus, Reverend Jackson’s media representation reinforced the image of black politicians as threatening and powerful.

Schaffner and Gadson (2004) point out two types of black candidates, including the traditional and “new style” strategies. The traditional candidates, such as Jackson, focus on issues they believe are important to the black community, while the new style politicians emphasize the “politics of commonality” (p. 606). These candidates tend to focus on being racially and culturally inclusive. The new style black politicians develop deracialized political strategies (Henry, 2008). In 1989, Douglass Wilder ran for governor in Virginia, adopting such a strategy in order to attract non-black voters. Blacks accounted for only 17 percent of the total vote (p.5). Wilder used abortion as an issue to attract white voters. Although Wilder eventually lost the election, it was “the closest in Virginia history—50.1 percent to 49.8 percent.” Thus,

Wilder's close race marks the beginning of black politicians adopting strategies that reached beyond the black community. While Reverend Jackson's message represented the traditional, older black political strategy, Senator Obama—like Wilder—was part of a new generation in which he sought to define himself as racially and culturally inclusive.

Henry (2008) asserts Reverend Jackson's campaign was different from Senator Obama's campaign in that it relied on a "dependent leverage" campaign. Reverend Jackson's campaign focused on requiring that Democrats address black issues. He heavily relied on the black church and community as the central constituency. His strategy gave him "immediate legitimacy as a threat within the Democratic party," limiting his reach to other voters. Thus, Reverend Jackson faced a dilemma in which he used the black community as his main base and, as a result, failed in attracting white voters. Reverend Jackson sought to fight this label by adopting the "rainbow coalition" for his main message, but the media and public maintained that he was "the black" candidate who cared mostly about black interests.

Reverend Jackson's presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988 were largely based on support from the black church in southern and urban cities (Harris-Lacewell, 2007; Henry 2008). "Not only did Jackson employ a rhetorical style reflecting his training as a black preacher, but he built a campaign organization centered on black Christian volunteers, black church contact lists, donations from black religious services and an ideology that relied heavily on black Christian understandings of the connection between the sacred and the political" (p. 180). In Reverend Jackson's first run in 1984, the campaign brought black issues to the forefront (Atwater, 2007). Atwater suggests that Reverend Jackson helped to "break down feelings of white superiority and more importantly, he restored the faith of many in the political process" (p. 123). Reverend Jackson began his political career primarily focused on elevating the black community and addressing their national and international interests. Reverend Jackson's message, however, was

not the only barrier in his candidacy, his race may have played a role as well. McIlwain (2007) examines how whites perceived and evaluated Reverend Jackson in the presidential primaries in 1988 and found that “the relationship between the candidate’s race and leadership was the most salient factor influencing vote choice...for Jackson, the Black candidate” (p. 69). Thus, the candidate not only had a problem with his message and constituency, but race also limited his candidacy because whites were less likely to perceive Reverend Jackson as a leader.

While Reverend Jackson’s 1984 campaign was not perceived as viable, he became a serious candidate in 1988 when he won more delegates than anyone except for Governor Dukakis. In 1988, Reverend Jackson succeeded in attracting more white voters than in 1984 by adopting a populist strategy that revolved around “hope,” according to Henry (2008). Still, Reverend Jackson’s message in 1988 largely addressed the interests of the black community compared to Senator Obama’s campaign in 2008. He attempted to mobilize the “politically excluded,” moving the Democratic Party “back toward its traditional base” (p. 5). His reliance on the black church “gave him immediate legitimacy as a threat within the Democratic Party and limited his ability to reach beyond his base” (p. 5). The influence the black church had on Reverend Jackson’s campaign shaped the structure of his message in which he presented the traditional sense of urgency for social change (McTighe, 1990). Reverend Jackson called “the nation back to its ideals and implored it to create a just society” (p. 585). His prophetic message presented a dilemma for succeeding in the presidential race because it primarily reflected the concerns of black Americans, according to McTighe.

Walters (2007) examines Reverend Jackson’s messages in 1984 and 1988 because he considers them to be the most important mobilizations of the black community. Reverend Jackson’s campaigns included several features such as empowering the black electorate, social change, black civic culture and black interests. These black interests consisted of how the U.S.

treated third world countries such as Cuba, Palestine, Nicaragua, the Middle East and Africa as well as civil rights for women, blacks and other oppressed people. Walker and Greene (2006) assert that Reverend Jackson used “his oratorical prowess, Civil Rights experience, and political knowledge as rhetorical tools to create public opportunities that help amplify the voices and perspectives of the underserved populations historically left unattended” (p. 63). The authors, however, contend that Reverend Jackson has been able to transcend the black community while simultaneously embracing all communities.

Common ground. America is not a blanket woven from one thread, one color, one cloth. When I was a child growing up in Greenville, South Carolina and grandmamma could not afford a blanket, she didn't complain and we did not freeze. Instead she took pieces of old cloth -- patches, wool, silk, gabardine, crockersack -- only patches, barely good enough to wipe off your shoes with. But they didn't stay that way very long. With sturdy hands and a strong cord, she sewed them together into a quilt, a thing of beauty and power and culture. Now, Democrats, we must build such a quilt. (Jackson, 1988)

Sullivan (1993) examined Reverend Jackson’s message at the Democratic Nomination in 1988 in his speech “Common Ground and Common Sense” and found that in some parts of his speech Reverend Jackson relied on rhetorical patterns linked to the black community. Sullivan examines the importance of signification in black rhetoric which attempts to “recover orality in the written word through the speakerly text,” which is a text associated with black oral cultures (p. 4).

Reverend Jackson, however, attempted to unite the Democratic Party by creating a “rainbow coalition” in his speech. He sought to symbolize America through his “quilt” metaphor, but he still thought it was important to articulate the struggles of the lower, oppressed social class—which the public may have easily interpreted as Reverend Jackson speaking about “black” issues. In using a rhetorical style from black church traditions, Reverend Jackson politically and culturally represented the black community. While the candidate attempted to expand his 1988 campaign, he still remained linked to the black community.

Media scholars have studied how the mainstream press covered Reverend Jackson's presidential campaigns. Dates and Gandy (1985) examined news coverage of Reverend Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign and asserted that "the emergence of Jackson as a strong candidate created a significant challenge of American media covering the '84 presidential campaign" (p. 595). The authors found that the media portrayed him differently from other candidates because of his race. The media also felt that Reverend Jackson had no chance of winning the election. The media focused on Reverend Jackson's style, rarely addressing his policy issues, according to Dates and Gandy. Sullivan (1993) found that two themes emerged from the mainstream media that caused white discomfort with Reverend Jackson's candidacy in 1988. These themes included the notion that Reverend Jackson was dishonest and too emotional in his speeches about his relationship with Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. The media focused on his language style, accusing Reverend Jackson of being "overly emotional." Sullivan asserts that "the assumption seemed to be, 'Why won't Jackson step aside and let the real candidates fight it out?'" (p. 3). Thus, the author argues that the media implied he did not belong "on the political stage" (p. 3). Sullivan argues that Reverend Jackson's Convention speech "Common Ground and Common Sense" relied on particular similar patterns of black rhetoric. The author contends "if [media] commentators had attempted to understand Jackson's discourse as emerging from an African-American speech community—a 'real community' with 'real values' and 'real politics,' he might not have been misunderstood" (p. 13). Mainstream media coverage primarily focused on Reverend Jackson's rhetoric and style rather than policy issues. While scholars have yet to analyze news coverage of Senator Obama's candidacy, previous research about Senator Obama addresses whether his racial identity affected his campaign—an issue that may signify one of the differences between Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama's candidacies.

“It is certainly intriguing that Obama, a visibly Black man, should have garnered so much political support from White citizens and in a country known for its deeply embedded racist traditions” (Mazama, 2007, p. 3). Forty years after Martin Luther King gave his “I have a dream speech” in Washington, D.C., on August 27, 2008, Senator Obama accepted the Democratic Nomination for president. His presidential race carried many hopes for Americans, uplifting the image of blacks across the country and the world. Many scholars argue that his campaign practiced a deracialized political strategy in which he broadened his base beyond black Americans. But throughout his campaign, several black intellectuals and political leaders questioned his racial identity. The differences between Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama’s “blackness” resulted from a variety of issues, such as their generational differences, racial interests and civil rights background. Walters (2007), however, argues that after Senator Obama won the Iowa primary in January 2008 and passed Clinton in the polls, he apparently “had begun to prove his Blackness” (p. 8).

In his book *Dreams From My Father*, Senator Obama describes his need to fit into the black community: “I knew it was too late to ever claim Africa as my home, and if I had come to understand myself as a black American, and was understood as such, that understanding remained unanchored to place. What I needed was a community that cut deeper than the common despair that black friends and I shared when reading the latest crime statistics...A place where I could put down stakes and test my commitments” (p. 115). Walters argues that Senator Obama’s search for “Blackness” provided Obama with the sensitivity to the issues of the black community. Walter, however, points out that Debra Dickerson, a black writer for the magazine *Salon*, wrote that Senator Obama is not a real black person, but a more acceptable version and that people were replacing “the black man with immigrant of recent African descent of whom you can approve without feeling either guilty or frightened” (p. 9). While Senator Obama

attempted to immerse himself into black culture, some black leaders continued to question his “black authenticity” and “political accountability” within the black community.

Research, however, also suggests that Senator Obama proved his “blackness”—while simultaneously reaching out to other voters—through his political strategy. Asante (2007) asserts that Senator Obama’s agency is itself an “Afrocentric act” (p. 106). The theory of agency consists of the idea that blacks must be viewed as agents rather than spectators to history, according to Asante. The “Afrocentric” act requires that Senator Obama sees himself as an actor rather than a spectator to the making of history who has not been silent in the political process. In his presidential bid Senator Obama needed to prove his “blackness” to the black community, while adopting an inclusive message.

Henry (2008) argues that Senator Obama had to demonstrate to white voters he would not be the president for only black Americans. Like Walters (2007) and Asante (2007), Henry argues that for those who assume a homogenous black identity, Senator Obama does not “sound Black and is therefore articulate” (p. 6). Senator Obama was labeled many symbols such as the “magic negro,” which is a “figure of post-modern folk culture that has no past and simply appears one day to help the white protagonist” (p. 6). The “magic negro” idea reinforces Obama’s “whiteness” where there is no history of “Jim Crow, anger or slavery” (p. 6).

Despite this label of “whiteness,” Senator Obama’s candidacy represented a dilemma for white voters. McIlwain (2007) writes that Senator Obama’s candidacy was framed around the question: “Is America ready for a Black president?” But McIlwain argues that the real question was whether whites could view a black candidate or Senator Obama as a leader. The author argues that “the question of leadership is, for White voters, a proxy for race” (p. 65). Presidential leadership has become important in shaping the role of presidential politics and public opinion about the president’s effectiveness, according to McIlwain. The author’s findings suggest that

white voters are less likely to perceive black politicians as strong leaders. Thus, it seems that black and white Americans questioned Senator Obama about his “blackness.” His adoption of a deracialized political strategy has brought him criticism from black scholars who have questioned his authenticity, but also from white voters who are skeptical about electing a black candidate.

The Senator, however, had inspired thousands of new, young and minority voters largely because of his overall message. Atwater (2007) examines Senator Obama’s message of hope and the “American dream.” Atwater defines his rhetoric of hope as “the use of symbols to get Americans to care about this country, to want to believe in this country, to regain hope and faith in this country, and to believe that we are more alike than we are different with a common destiny and a core set of values” (p.123). The author examines Senator Obama’s 2004 Keynote speech at the Democratic Nomination Convention as well as his book *Audacity of Hope*. The author argues that Senator Obama “expresses an unfailing, steadfast sense of optimism and hope” (p. 128).

Yet even as we speak, there are those who are preparing to divide us, the spin masters and negative ad peddlers who embrace the politics of anything goes. Well, I say to them tonight, there's not a liberal America and a conservative America - there's the United States of America. There's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America. The pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I've got news for them, too. We worship an awesome God in the Blue States, and we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the Red States. We coach Little League in the Blue States and have gay friends in the Red States. There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq and patriots who supported it. We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America. (Barack Obama, 2004)

Frank and McPhail (2005) argue that Senator Obama’s 2004 speech marked a significant moment in the “trajectory of African American rhetoric.” Frank perceives Senator Obama’s speech as a “rhetoric of consilience” in which audiences can leave their separate experiences

behind and unite through common values or aspirations, fostering reconciliation (p.572). For McPhail, however, Senator Obama's speech is an "old vision of racelessness" and "appeals to those ideological impulses at work in the rhetoric of white racial recovery" (p. 573). Thus, McPhail argues that Senator Obama's rhetoric represents "whiteness," and "appeals to the abstractions and ideals of a transcendent social contract while obscuring or ignoring altogether traumatic causes and consequences of America's racial past" (p. 573). McPhail argues that unlike Martin Luther King, Senator Obama invokes "erasure" of race rather than "re-signing" it. Thus, while many scholars have noted his rhetoric of hope as a promising message, McPhail perceives Senator Obama's discourse as apologetic to America's racial past. Thus, Senator Obama's message differs from Reverend Jackson's rhetoric in that the senator has largely focused on a deracialized political message, which McPhail perceives as erasing race not reconciling race.

Elahi and Cos (2005) contend that Senator Obama's 2004 Convention speech "infused into the American dream myth via his own immigrant narrative." The author points out that Senator Obama told his story, which largely surrounded his father's dreams. Elahi and Cos suggest that Senator Obama serves as an "agent of moralistic myth of the American dream in its purest sense" (p. 462). Rowland and Jones (2007) also examine Senator Obama's role in invoking the American dream, focusing on "reclaiming the romantic narrative we have identified for liberals" (p. 428). These authors define the American dream as a narrative that functions as the "rhetorical embodiment of American classical liberalism," which is an ideology of both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Through the rhetoric of classical liberalism, Senator Obama "created a narrative that balanced personal and societal values and in doing so made the American dream more accessible to liberals" (p. 434). Thus, he redefined the American dream, using individual responsibility as a tool for broadening the focus on social responsibility. Dorsey

and Diaz-Barriga (2007) argue that Senator Obama represents a “both...and” approach to immigration that focuses on an “earned citizenship.” Therefore, Senator Obama’s positions have largely revolved around an effort to bring together people from different backgrounds and to offer a rhetoric of change in Washington. Because Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama represented dissimilar messages, this thesis sought to examine whether the *Chicago Defender*, which has often acted as a political institution, framed these two candidates differently. The next chapter addresses how the mainstream and black media have framed prominent figures and how framing may affect public perception of political candidates.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework: Framing

Major Ideas of Framing Theory

Framing is a common theory used to study media effects. Some research has identified framing as the second-level of agenda setting, which may also be called “attribute agenda setting” (Sheafer, 2007). The second-level of agenda setting or framing also focuses on “how to think about” an issue. The main idea is “that the attributes of the object emphasized by the news media affect the saliency of those attributes in the public’s mind,” leading to specific evaluations (p.22). Attributes are referred to as characteristics included in the picture of the object or issue such as a political candidate’s issue positions and qualifications. Scheufele (2000) also identifies second-level agenda setting or “frame-setting” as concerned with the “salience of issue attributes,” but argues that framing should be separated entirely from agenda setting. The author argues that empirical evidence has demonstrated that “perceived importance of specific frames” is more important than the saliency of issues. Therefore, frames “influence opinions by stressing specific values, facts, and other considerations, endowing them with greater apparent relevance to the issue than they might appear to have under an alternative frame” (p.298). Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) also contend that framing is significantly different from both agenda setting and framing; framing assumes that the way an issue is interpreted in news reports will affect how audiences understand the issue.

Although framing consists of a variety of definitions, the main ideas of framing theory in mass media focus on how audiences think about issues. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) argue that framing addresses “whether” people think about an issue and “how” they think about it (p. 14). Schuefele (1999) suggests media frames address “what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” as well as the frames that journalists use (p.106). Price and Tewksbury (1997) also

assert framing focuses on how the media influences public opinion about political events, how journalists produce stories, the information that receives attention and how it is presented. Thus, framing involves several factors, which include journalistic practices that influence how a story is packaged and how an audience will perceive that package.

Scheufele (1999) identifies various definitions of media frames that address the story line or packaging of news that convey messages to audiences. These definitions sometimes include problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations and treatment recommendations (Weaver, 2007). Gamson (1989) defines framing “as a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue” (p. 157). According to Gamson, journalists often tell stories in different ways where some facts are embedded into a story line or theme, while others are left out. Framing may also involve selection and salience in which journalists address only certain issues while making them more salient among the audience (Watkins, 2001). Entman (1993) writes that framing includes both selection and salience. Frames select “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). Thus, one of the main ideas about framing is that the themes emphasized and ignored are important to how the audience will think about an issue.

Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) identify framing as a concept that assumes an issue in the news will affect how the audience understands it (p. 11). The authors define framing as both a “microconstruct” and “macroconstruct” (p. 12). While the macroconstruct refers to how journalists present information in ways that affect their audiences “underlying schemas,” the microconstruct addresses how audiences use information to form opinions (p. 12). Scheufele (2000) also discusses the significance of the macroscopic approach, which derives from a sociological view of framing, emphasizing on how journalistic norms and routines influence

media frames. The microscopic or psychological approach to framing “examines frames as individual means of processing and structuring incoming information” (p. 301). This approach focuses on how individuals employ different ways of interpreting media coverage. Some researchers argue that framing is a theory influencing the interpretation of incoming information, rather than making issues more salient (Weaver, 2007, p. 145). Therefore, both the sociological and psychological approaches provide framing theory its main ideas for studying how journalists influence frames and how individuals think about those frames.

Framing and Race

Race may play an important role in how citizens evaluate politicians (Schaffner & Gadson, 2004). Literature shows that issues or events regarding minorities in the mainstream press are more likely to include racial frames of news coverage. Schaffner and Gadson found that local television newscasts devoted more coverage to black political candidates, but they found that in less diverse cities, local television news coverage on black candidates presented race-oriented themes regardless of the candidates’ interests in minority issues.

Caliendo and Charlton (2006) write that “a growing body of evidence demonstrates that whites’ racial predispositions and resentments become salient factors in their political decisions when primed by various forms of racialized communication” (p.46). The authors, however, contend that there is a lack of empirical evidence demonstrating a causal link between “white” racial attitudes and their decision to vote for minority candidates. Caliendo and Charlton (2006) use framing theory and priming to examine the frames of minority candidates presented in news coverage. The authors found that election coverage involving biracial and “all-black” contests contained more references to race than in “all-white” contests. The article also demonstrates that journalists tend to focus on racial references of candidates in a competitive election contest.

Thus, the authors found racial frames of news coverage that focused on candidates' race and the race of voters.

Watkins (2001) found that mainstream news coverage of the Million Man March on October 15, 1995, led by Louis Farrakhan who is the leader of the Nation of Islam, presented frames that juxtaposed Farrakhan with more respectable African American leaders such as Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr (p. 96). Dominant frames focused on Farrakhan's racial and political views, rather than the greater social issues addressed by the march. Entman and Rojecki (2001) assert that because black political leaders mostly address African Americans issues, media coverage may be right in representing those narrow behaviors. The growth of black politicians present in the media "coexists with signals that reinforce the older sense of fundamental racial difference and a newer sense of fundamental political conflict" (p.142). Thus, black politicians and social leaders are depicted as public figures that speak for all African Americans.

Boyle, Schmierbach, Armstrong, Cho, McCluskey, McLeod and Shah (2006) also test framing theory in news coverage of activist or extremist groups, arguing that "media representations have the potential to shape both an individual's perception of the opinion climate and how an individual perceives a group" (p. 274). The authors demonstrate that individual-based and group-based frames affected the willingness of participants to engage in expressive action. The researchers found expressive action in support of a group increases with more positive feelings toward that group, while expressive action against a group increases with more negative feelings toward that group; thus, predispositions significantly influence how individuals will show expression. Kioussis, Bantimaroudis and Ban (1999) also argue that media representations of certain figures tend to influence how the public perceives them. They found that media portrayals of certain political attributes influenced how citizens evaluated political candidates. Although this thesis does not address how the public perceived Reverend Jackson

and Senator Obama, these studies are important because they show how the black press may have influenced how the black community thought about race in both of the candidates' campaigns.

Implications for Framing Theory

Framing theory contributes to the effects of mass communication through several factors including professional values, which is called frame building (Scheufele, 1999). Research has also attempted to look at how journalists are influenced by these restraints and values when framing news content. According to Scheufele (1999) frame building captures the processes that journalists undergo when presenting their stories to the public with specific frames. Three potential sources for how journalists create frames include "ideology, attitudes and professional norms" (p. 115). Scholars also argue that public opinion is easily manipulated through the framing of political leaders, not journalists. Journalists tend to frame news stories based on how politicians present information to them (Nelson, Oxley, Clawson, 1997; Chong and Druckman, 2007; Kent & Davis, 2006). Thus, research indicates that journalistic practices influence media frames. Therefore, the black press, namely the *Chicago Defender*, may have used its professional goals of black elevation in framing both Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama. Furthermore, this thesis analyzes how the *Chicago Defender* framed these two candidates' campaign messages.

Research Questions

- 1) Did the *Chicago Defender's* news coverage frame Reverend Jackson through an Afro-centric perspective and Senator Obama through an assimilation view?
- 2) How did the *Chicago Defender* respond to Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama's attempts to politically and culturally reach black and white voters?
- 3) Did the *Chicago Defender* elevate Senator Obama and Reverend Jackson equally?
- 4) Did race frame the *Defender's* coverage of Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama?

Chapter 4

Methodology

This thesis used framing theory to qualitatively analyze news content in the *Chicago Defender*, which has been one of the leading Black newspapers that frame racial stories differently from the mainstream press (Huspeck, 2004; Digby-Junger, 1997) and it has “signaled a move away from the upper-class, partisan, often genteel Black newspapers and magazines of the postbellum era and the introduction of the first commercially viable mass circulation Black press in the world” (Digby-Junger, 1997, p.263). This thesis primarily addresses how the *Chicago Defender* has framed black political candidates with different racial political messages.

To analyze news coverage in the *Defender*, I employed textual analysis to uncover the frames of Jackson and Obama. Fraley and Lester-Roushanzamir (2004) argue that “textual analysis provides a critical tool for analyzing media content because its objective is not to analyze content per se, but concrete social processes of which a text offers evidence” (p. 154). Therefore, I chose textual analysis because this method allows researchers to address the cultural and social environment of the time period being studied. Thus, I addressed the context behind Jackson and Obama’s historical presidential campaigns in order to provide potential explanations for their news coverage. Fraley and Lester-Roushanzamir used textual analysis as a means of looking at race, professional journalism as well as media messages. Therefore, using textual analysis allowed me to examine how race played a role in how the black press framed Jackson and Obama.

Specifically, I chose discourse analysis, which is one of the methods that falls under textual analysis, as a way of uncovering meanings from the text of news content. Van Dijk (1991) uses discourse analysis to examine how the “Western press, and especially the right-wing press, reproduces and further emphasizes a negative image of minorities, immigrants, and

refugees, and thereby contributes to increasing forms of tolerance, prejudice, and discrimination against Third World peoples in Europe and North America” (p. 111). Van Dijk’s use of discourse analysis allowed him to study how text produced in the media addressed how social groups were portrayed. Van Dijk also suggests that discourse analysis allows the researcher to analyze themes, style of story, headlines, lead paragraphs and choice of words (p. 113). Themes, words and phrases are important to examine in this thesis because they may reveal how the role of race and political message influenced how the black press framed Jackson and Obama. Van Dijk also contends that researchers should study the mental processes of language users and strategies used by journalists in the production of news reports. Thus, this thesis sought to examine how race and professional goals of the black press shaped their news frames on Jackson and Obama. The professional goals of the *Chicago Defender*—which include advocacy for civil rights, black elevation and pride, according to previous literature—will provide special insight to how the black press continues to shape their own black public sphere. Discourse analysis helped me distinguish whether the newspaper perceived the candidates’ race as more important than their messages.

For the sample, this thesis analyzed eight months of news coverage in the *Chicago Defender* before both Democratic National Conventions. I examined and interpreted themes, words, phrases and tone of story articles, as Van Dijk suggests. News coverage includes stories about Jackson from December 21, 1987 to July 21, 1988 and Obama from January 27, 2008 to August 27, 2008. This time period also allows the researcher to capture any incidents that may have affected how the *Chicago Defender* framed Jackson and Obama, such as the media exposure of Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s relationship with Obama. News coverage included both news stories and editorials, which provided a holistic picture on how the newspaper engaged in

discourse about the role of race in politics and how it perceived Obama's deracialized political message compared to Jackson's race-centered message.

Chapter 5

Results

For this thesis, I analyzed news coverage of Reverend Jesse Jackson and President Barack Obama's campaigns in the *Chicago Defender*. Throughout my findings, I discuss the *Defender* as if it were a single person reporting or editorializing about the candidates' campaigns. While I recognize that reporters and columnists were responsible for much of the news coverage, I found it important to speak about this newspaper as one entity because research has indicated that those reporters and writers who have worked for the black press have often acknowledged their job was to advocate for civil rights or elevate the black community. Peebles (2008) writes that the black press "played a fundamental role in facilitating the consolidation of individual political voices in order to present a solidified, public front" (p. 79). I used these editorials and articles to create a holistic illustration of the *Defender's* news coverage during Reverend Jackson's campaign in 1988 and Senator Obama's candidacy in 2008.

In attempting to understand how the *Defender* created meaning for the black community about these black political candidates, I sought to answer a) whether the newspaper framed Reverend Jackson through an Afro-centric perspective and Senator Obama through an assimilation view; b) how the newspaper reacted to their attempts to culturally reach black and white voters; c) whether Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama were elevated equally; d) whether race was a predominant frame in the candidates' news coverage. Below, I briefly discuss these themes and then provide a thorough explanation of each theme separately.

Overall, I found three main themes that answer these questions. Instead of framing Reverend Jackson through an Afrocentric view, the newspaper attempted to convey that he had adopted a new message, compared to his race-centered campaign in 1984. The *Defender's* coverage shows that Reverend Jackson had adopted a human rights message rather than an

Afrocentric perspective. The *Defender* attempted to elevate the candidate and praised his attempt to spread the rainbow coalition message to white voters, but remained skeptical about the coalition actually working. This new message symbolized progress and sought to reach black and white liberal voters as well as those who made up the poor and oppressed social classes of America. For Senator Obama's coverage, the *Defender* presented the candidate through an assimilation view, labeling him as a "healer" who could unite all American citizens. Senator Obama's deracialized political message in which he attempted to reach both white and minority voters was overwhelmingly embraced. By embracing this candidate's campaign, the *Defender* made a strong effort to elevate Senator Obama.

Based on previous literature on the black press, elevation occurs when newspapers focus on favorable news coverage that seeks to correct misrepresentations and shows progress within the black community. Peebles (2008) discusses elevation, suggesting that "columns promoting education, temperance, hard work, industry and moral conviction, alongside pleas for political action, were very much the staple of antebellum black newspapers" (p. 80). The author writes that editors of the black press were concerned with how black Americans conducted themselves within the community and the country. "Hoping to influence subscribers, black newspapers promoted an ideal vision of upright living" and "printed exemplary stories of African Americans who, by hard work and moral conviction, had elevated themselves in society" (p. 80). Thus, for the *Defender*, Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama represented two successful black individuals who had elevated themselves through hard work and political power; thus, the newspaper demonstrated that black Americans could be successful within the political community.

The newspaper's attempt to elevate Reverend Jackson, however, diminished when it questioned the reverend's ability to win. While the *Defender* supported and attempted to elevate

Reverend Jackson, editorials and news articles suggested that it remained skeptical about his chances of winning. Senator Obama's coverage, however, indicated that the newspaper immediately embraced his "non-racial" campaign, pushing their readers to vote for the "right" black candidate. Thus, the *Defender* did not elevate the candidates equally; instead, the newspaper supported Senator Obama more than Reverend Jackson. Also, horse race coverage appeared during both campaigns. While this coverage was embedded with racial themes, it also identified the conflict between Reverend Jackson and Governor Michael Dukakis, and Senator Obama and Senator Hillary Clinton. Overall, for both candidates, race predominantly framed the coverage. Nevertheless, during Senator Obama's campaign editorials suggested the election was not about race; rather, it implied that electing the "right" black candidate for the presidential seat would elevate the black race. Thus, for the *Defender*, Reverend Jackson may not have been the right candidate for the White House, but he did represent the black community. On the contrary, Senator Obama symbolized the future of the black race and America. Below, I provide evidence for each theme, arguing that while Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama symbolized progress for the black community during both time periods, the *Defender* made a strategic decision in elevating Senator Obama in 2008 more than Reverend Jackson in 1988. This strategic decision consisted of the *Defender* endorsing the candidate with the deracialized campaign; Senator Obama's assimilation message signified his chances of winning the presidency.

The New Jackson and Obama, the Healer

Throughout the *Defender's* news coverage, the newspaper repeatedly used Reverend Jackson and campaign supporters as positive sources who repeatedly argued that the candidate's 1988 campaign was different from his 1984 race-centered presidential bid; instead, Reverend Jackson's 1988 campaign attempted to spread a broader message to all citizens. The *Defender* supported Reverend Jackson's rainbow coalition message in his 1988 campaign. It did not

initially frame the candidate through an Afro-centric perspective; however, the *Defender* continued to link Reverend Jackson to black interests because of his past civil rights career in the 1960s and his race-centered message in the 1984 election.

While the *Defender* sought to articulate that Reverend Jackson's campaign in 1988 was significantly different from his 1984 bid, it remained dedicated to linking Jackson with the black community. Previous literature indicates that the black press sought to advocate for the black community and elevate their readers, but also to establish an alternative public sphere where whites could see different perspectives of black Americans (Hutton, 2004, p. 71). These alternative perspectives helped to elevate the black race. From the beginning of Reverend Jackson's presidential campaign, the *Defender* sought to convey that the candidate was still fighting for the black community, while simultaneously demonstrating to white voters that he had broadened his message to fit all Americans. Furthermore, in its own way, the *Defender* elevated Jackson by suggesting his new message would reach beyond his black constituency.

Several editorials demonstrated a need to support Reverend Jackson's efforts to reach black and white voters in order to elevate him; in 1988, the *Defender* merely focused on the candidate's progress. Approximately two months after Reverend Jackson announced his presidential bid in October 1987, the *Defender* wrote that the candidate had "called upon Israel to end its 'repression' of the Palestinians and asked that they withdraw their troops from the occupied territories" (Strausberg, 1987, p. 1). It added that Jackson had said the U.S. could not remain silent 'when millions [were] malnourished and starving to death in Ethiopia and Africa' (p. 1). The article illustrates that Reverend Jackson had immediately begun addressing the concerns of minorities in the U.S. but also those around the world. This quote provides a glimpse into how Reverend Jackson was beginning to articulate his human rights message. Three months later, on March 1, 1988, journalist Chinta Strausberg wrote that the Illinois campaign manager

for Reverend Jackson's campaign said 'voters of all walks of life are finding common ground in the Jackson campaign' (p. 3). The *Defender* attempted to illustrate that the candidate's rainbow coalition message was working to expand beyond the black vote. On April 5, the *Defender* published an article quoting an official from Panama: 'Reverend Jackson is showing his good intentions toward his Latin American brothers,' adding that Jackson 'sees us as brothers in misery' ("Jesse downplays letter," 1988, p. 4). Not only was Reverend Jackson interested in speaking about blacks around the world, but also reaching other "oppressed" communities that had been left out of the political process in the United States. In the same article, Strausberg wrote that Jackson had committed himself to "bringing all ethnic groups [to] . . . the March 8 Super Tuesday elections in 20...southern states" (p. 3). The *Defender* also reported that "only Jackson [was] speaking to the oppressed and dispossessed of all races" (Marable, 1988, p. 12). While several of these quotes came from campaign sources, these articles were consistent with the expectation that the *Defender* was creating a positive image of Reverend Jackson's 1988 campaign by portraying him as civil rights leader who was attempting to expand his black interest agenda to a human rights perspective.

News coverage continued to illustrate that Reverend Jackson was a different candidate in 1988, compared to his controversial 1984 campaign where the black church and community propped his candidacy, by showing his growing popularity among white voters. Days before the New York primary, on April 11, 1988, journalist Henry Locke reported that two political strategists said Reverend Jackson had accumulated "enough momentum, with the support of millions of whites, to become the nations first Black presidential nominee" (p. 11). This line shows that at one point the *Defender* potentially considered Reverend Jackson could be the first Black presidential nominee. In an editorial published on April, 25, 1988, freelance writer Philip John claimed that "the Jackson message of hope [had] touched all Americans who [were] victims

of the effects of failed economic policies” (p. 12). According to the *Defender*, on May 3, Jackson spoke to high school students in Cleveland, Ohio: ‘Why is it important in your formative years that you share – red, black, brown and white? Because that is the real world and you can’t learn in isolation. Our future is beyond one language and one race’ (“Jackson says Dukakis,” 1988, p. 1). A few days later in May, The *Defender* published an editorial suggesting that the “Rainbow Coalition [showed] us, once again, that common ground can be found and common links can be made when people choose to look beyond difference; beyond self-interest; beyond past experiences to a common good” (Compton, 1988, p. 12). This line illustrates how the *Defender* conveyed that Reverend Jackson’s message had improved and how he may have had a chance to succeed. Here, the newspaper elevated Reverend Jackson by demonstrating that he was making an effort to unite American citizens. News coverage indicated that Jackson’s message had broadened and had begun to address “human rights” not “black interests.”

Through the use of its sources and some editorials, the *Defender* focused on conveying that Reverend Jackson’s message was slowly changing from an Afrocentric point of view to a human rights perspective. On May 31, according to the *Defender*, Reverend Jackson had claimed the campaign was “lifting people everyday...above the ancient and divisive sins of racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, escapism, fear, leading our nation beyond war” (Strausberg, 1988, p. 3). This news article strays from objective reporting and infuses a positive tone that implies Reverend Jackson was good for America, another way the newspaper elevated the candidate. In another editorial, guest columnist Chester L. Blair (1988) wrote that Reverend Jackson “didn’t bite his tongue about what he believes the Democratic party should be doing concerning issues dearest to his heart” (p. 10). These beliefs included the rights of minorities and education. Here, this editorial further indicates that the newspaper did not perceive Reverend Jackson’s minority concerns negatively or threatening. Blair noted that Jackson was “akin to the bald eagle: that

rare species of politician who will take on the leaders of his own party as well as the present administration” (p. 10). The editorial’s implication that Reverend Jackson was a “rare species” indicates that Jackson’s message and political strategy surpassed the other candidates. Guest columnist Manning Marable (1998) wrote that the candidate “effectively linked the Civil Rights agenda from the Black Movement to a broader human rights and economic justice agenda which speaks to the conditions of most Americans, white, Hispanic and Afro-Americans” (p. 12). Once again, this line supports the idea that Reverend Jackson’s black agenda was expanding into an agenda that fit many Americans regardless of race. The *Defender*, supported Reverend Jackson’s new human rights message because he attempted to reach white voters, an important constituency necessary for winning presidential elections.

Furthermore, Reverend Jackson’s efforts signified progress for the black race and black politics. On May 18, 1988, guest columnist James W. Compton claimed that “we appear to be witnessing an expression of a longing for action that promotes peace, economic justice and social progress” and that Jackson’s message was “making sense in 1988” (p. 12). Here, the author pointed out that Reverend Jackson’s 1988 message was a strategy that worked to promote social progress and justice, an agenda found within the black political community as well as the black press.

For the newspaper, this progress included Reverend Jackson’s call to American citizens who had been left out of the political process to vote in the 1988 election. During the Atlanta convention in July 1988—after it became clear that Governor Dukakis would be the Democratic presidential nominee—writer David Scondras wrote in the *Defender* that the 1984 election had a different message from the 1988 campaign: “In spite of Mondale’s record of support for people of color, the public perception that Jesse Jackson was treated unfairly cost Mondale Black votes. The centrists position is that Blacks, gays, feminists, the peace movement, and progressives in

general have no alternative to the Democrats, so the party should appeal to the Reagan Democrats” (1988, p. 4). In his article, Scondras argued that Democrats did have an alternative: to stay home. He added that the election of 1984 failed to incorporate the “agenda of those who had been historically left out of American political life...and who [were] growing larger in numbers and stronger organizationally” (p.4). Again, this editorial points to the *Defender’s* effort to elevate Reverend Jackson by suggesting he was impacting the election in a significant way. Scondras asserted that Governor Dukakis had a party that would have difficulty attracting new Democratic voters who Reverend Jackson had brought into the party. Scondras added that Reverend Jackson had received 38 percent of the white vote in Maine’s Democratic caucus, making it “quite clear that the populist, progressive agenda put forth by Jackson filled such a deep need among those who have been otherwise alienated from politics, that it [had] the power to overcome the issue of race itself” (p. 4). Here is a glimpse of what the candidate had set out to do in 1988. This editorial points out Jackson had received more political power, which ensured the *Defender’s* readers that the candidate was dedicated to fighting for citizens outside of the mainstream public. Jackson had “organized those who had been abandoned by the party and said there was room on his bus for those who had been told to walk behind” and as a direct result “he [went] to Atlanta with a third of the popular vote” (p. 8). Here, Scondras emphasizes the importance of the black vote and seeks to elevate Reverend Jackson as a candidate who had a powerful role in the 1988 election. The editorial further indicates that Reverend Jackson’s broader message in 1988 had allowed him to invite more voters into the political process and the Democratic party, especially compared to his campaign in 1984. Scondras’ editorial further demonstrates how the newspaper elevated Jackson’s campaign by showing the candidate had tremendous political power in 1988.

For the *Defender*, this political power was a problem for the mainstream political community. On April 4, 1988, guest columnist Manning Marable wrote in an editorial that Reverend Jackson's success was the biggest surprise for the mainstream political community in the 1988 presidential campaign. Marable implied Reverend Jackson's success was a surprise for the mainstream community but not the black race. Marable referred to the candidate's first attempt in 1984, claiming that political pundits thought Reverend Jackson's campaign was a "fluke, a novelty" (p. 12). While the *Defender* remained supportive and chose to defend Reverend Jackson, it did not articulate how the candidate could win. In this editorial, the newspaper merely sought to correct misrepresentations of Reverend Jackson in the mainstream community.

In some cases, however, the newspaper admitted that Reverend Jackson's success relied on his association with black politics. While the *Defender* sought to introduce the "new Jackson," it understood that Reverend Jackson remained heavily associated with black politics; therefore, it would be difficult for him to win the nomination. Despite the *Defender's* attempt to portray Reverend Jackson in 1988 as a different candidate from the one in 1984, the newspaper consistently linked his ties to the black community. Journalist Henry Locke reported on April 11, 1988 that a victory in the New York primary would rely on Democratic black and liberal voters. A Reverend Jackson supporter and board member of Operation PUSH said that if black voters did not turn out on primary day then Jackson would lose, according to the article (p. 11). While these quotes may be facts, it illustrates how the newspaper returned to the importance of the black vote. The black vote was essential for Reverend Jackson's success because his chances of receiving enough white votes were slim, according to the *Defender*.

Throughout the coverage of Reverend Jackson's campaign, the *Defender* repeatedly returned to Jackson's original constituency, which had been his main base in 1984. In March, the

Defender wrote that “even as his acceptance [grew] among white Democratic voters, Jackson never [forgot] the bedrock of his Southern support [was] Black” and that the black vote made up Reverend Jackson’s candidacy (“Jesse assails,” 1988, p. 8). The newspaper reported that Reverend Jackson’s minority support was enough for him to be ahead of the other candidates in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Virginia. Guest columnist Manning Marable wrote that the majority of black elected officials in Congress and in local government had endorsed Reverend Jackson and that the candidate’s percentage of the black electorate had passed 90 percent where it was 80 percent in 1984. These articles show that Reverend Jackson’s campaign remained dependent on the black vote despite his new message. This type of coverage may have appeared in the mainstream news media in 1988, but the *Defender* offered an alternative view. This newspaper provided favorable coverage about Reverend Jackson even as he remained linked to black politics in order to continue its goals of elevation.

On March 10, the *Defender* again referred to Reverend Jackson’s solid black constituency: “As it has in the past, a near solid black vote provided the underpinning for Jackson’s success, although he increased his margin among white voters from the low levels of his first presidential campaign in 1984” (“Jesse predicts tight Illinois,” 1988, p. 6). Here, the *Defender* maintained that success depended on the black vote, but it also noted his achievements in receiving some white votes. Before the Illinois primary in March, the *Defender* reported that Reverend Jackson expected to win the support from the “same voters who gave the nation’s third-largest city its first Black mayor” (Kuczka, 1988, p. 4). In an article that appeared on March 8, the newspaper reported in its lead that Reverend Jackson’s campaign expected “four times as many Blacks [to] vote than in the 1984 city election” (Bratcher, 1988, p. 3). Thus, Reverend Jackson had to depend on the black vote to be successful during the primaries. This coverage

simultaneously suggests that the newspaper saw Reverend Jackson's chances of winning the white vote diminishing.

The newspaper understood that Reverend Jackson's race and past would prevent him from winning. In an editorial published on April 7, 1988, guest columnist Michael Watson wrote that the Democratic Party was "still reeling beneath the force of a startling revelation – Jesse L. Jackson, reverend, civil rights activist, staunch supporter of any logical solution that empowers people to empower themselves, whether it's by jobs, education or drug free minds, is Black" (p. 14). The newspaper reminded its readers that Reverend Jackson's race would be an obstacle for non-black Americans to overcome. Watson also claimed that the "Black minister" was "blasting through state after state, winning caucuses, snaring delegates and votes at an alarming rate" and suggested America was "racist" and "old-fashioned" and was not ready for a black president. Here, the *Defender* acknowledged that Jackson would have a slim possibility of winning the nomination, rejecting the notion that Jackson's rainbow coalition could be built or that it could reach white voters and be successful.

Twenty years later, however, the *Defender* saw that the role of race in American politics could possibly change. Reverend Jackson's support lacked the enthusiasm that Senator Obama had in 2008. News coverage indicates the newspaper expected Reverend Jackson's controversial past to intervene in his campaign; thus, limiting his chances of winning. On the contrary, the *Defender* elevated Senator Obama to a "healer" who could save the nation from the war in Iraq and other national issues, such as the economy, that had emerged during President George Bush's administration in the early 2000s. For the *Defender*, his campaign marked a significant change for America because Senator Obama's deracialized message culturally and politically reached white voters, which undoubtedly increased his chances of winning the highest elected office in the U.S. In 1988, however, the *Defender* remained supportive of Reverend Jackson, but

skeptical. The difference in elevation and support suggests that the *Defender* may have made a careful calculation in urging the black community to vote for a black candidate who could win the presidential seat. Reverend Jackson's campaign did not enjoy the same enthusiasm, but evidence shows the newspaper attempted to support him, elevating the candidate by focusing on his progress and achievements within the political community.

On May 18, 1988, James W. Compton claimed that Reverend Jackson was making a viable bid for the presidency and that "generations to come [would] have greater reason to believe that any child can grow up to be president" (p. 12). This one sentence foreshadows how the *Defender* would cover another black presidential candidate who would be new to the black community. Clearly, Reverend Jackson was a precursor to Senator Barack Obama; furthermore, throughout its coverage, the *Defender* articulated that Senator Obama was the right black candidate for the presidency because of his assimilation perspective and his deracialized political strategy. Much of the editorial coverage during Reverend Jackson's campaign suggested that he was changing his Afro-centric message and surprising the political community with his appeal to liberal white voters, but the *Defender* remained skeptical about Reverend Jackson winning in 1988. The *Defender*, however, overwhelmingly embraced Senator Obama's assimilation message, suggesting that the black community and other citizens needed to vote for him for the presidential seat. Senator Obama, who had no history with civil rights leaders in the beginning of his campaign, had adopted a deracialized message in which he attempted to appeal to all voters, not merely the black community; thus, the *Defender's* news coverage from January to the Democratic National Convention in August 2008 focused on embracing Senator Obama, who "defied racial stereotypes even as he constructed a new paradigm of hope built on his mantra for change" (Logan, 2008, p. 15). Furthermore, it sought to persuade the black community and white voters to support Senator Obama in order to elevate the black race.

Early in the 2008, the *Defender* began advocating for Senator Obama's campaign, pushing the idea that the candidate could win the presidential ticket. On January 4, the *Defender* published Ron Walter's column "Guess what? Obama can win the presidential race," which claimed that Senator Obama "beat all of the Republican candidates in the race by a greater margin than anyone else on the Democratic side" in a poll and that those who considered him "unelectable or who have, like myself, questioned whether he could be elected, [would] have to take a second look" (p. 7). In the beginning of Senator Obama's campaign in 2007, the black community questioned whether he would attract enough white voters to win the presidency. But by January 2008, Senator Obama began surpassing Senator Hillary Clinton in polls. In the same editorial, Walters wrote: "There is this deep-seated thing among Black people, born of their experience with American racism, which informs them that it is unlikely that whites will support a Black man for president at the end of the day" (p. 7). Walters suggested many black Democrats would vote for Senator Clinton because of their fear for losing the general election. But Walters wrote that the "stars are lining up and forcing Blacks and everyone else in American who would not vote for a Black man to make a choice" (p. 7). He added that "Obama [was] so far better than Hillary that to vote for anyone else would dissipate Black political power (p. 7). Furthermore, Walters suggested that "most of the hesitancy about Obama being elected . . . focused on his lack of experience" (p. 7). He claimed, however, that this was the time for Senator Obama: "This is Obama's time not because he is telegenic and promises a new day, but he is otherwise qualified and represents a new direction on the war, not race relations. If there were no war in Iraq, there would be no Barack Obama. He is not challenging whites to make a racial change" (p. 7). Thus, Senator Obama's campaign was not about race or race relations, according to Walters. Senator Obama's political strategy was a tool that would get him into Washington to heal and save the nation.

After winning the Iowa caucuses in January 2008, in which white citizens overwhelmingly voted for the black candidate for the first time, Walters (2008) wrote that Senator Obama was a “political movement” and that “the emotional appeal that he [had] created [was] not about him only, or that it signaled much about the future of race relations in America” (p. 9). Instead, “Obama’s thoughtful, direct oratory [had] touched a nerve in the electorate that [was] comprised of at least two basic strains” (p. 9). These strains included the war and his message of hope, according to Walters. Furthermore, Walters contended the Iowa caucuses helped to establish Senator Obama’s “electability as a candidate for president, not an African American candidate” (p. 9). Here is another suggestion that indicates the *Defender* was throwing race out of the election in order to elevate this candidate. Elevation occurred because it attempted to take Senator Obama out of a racial lens and place him in the mainstream America. Walters’ editorials suggest that race was not the issue; rather, other factors such as the Iraq war and negative criticism of the George Bush administration were helping Senator Obama win. Because this candidate largely avoided discussing race issues throughout his campaign and focused on current issues such as the economy, the *Defender* immediately saw the possibility of Senator Obama winning the presidency, a phenomenon that did not occur during Reverend Jackson’s 1988 campaign. While these editorials were the opinions of writers, they were consistent with the expectation that the *Defender* would seek to elevate Senator Obama.

In embracing Senator Obama, the *Defender* positively reacted to his message about unity and change, implying that he could reach both white and black voters. Columnist Anthony Asadulla Samad wrote in the *Defender* his preference was Senator Obama, “not just because he’s Black but because he had the most salient unifying message” and that “only one candidate in either major party had a resonating message going into the Iowa caucus” (2008, p. 7). Samad added that the message was “change” and the messenger was Senator Obama, whose “crossover

appeal [was] unprecedented as his message with all races and classes” (p. 7). In addition to the candidate’s “crossover appeal” and “change” message, according to the *Defender*, Senator Obama’s candidacy had energized voters because these citizens saw an “opportunity for change, away from the same old order to a New National Order” (Ransom, 2008, p. 12). The new national order, which represented a generational shift within the black community, placed Senator Obama away from traditional black politics.

Ransom’s editorial argued that the older group of black leaders had to “move out of the way, or get moved out of the way” (p. 12). In his editorial, Ransom pointed out a schism that had occurred in the black community. One of the requirements of the “new national order” would be a “new sensibility about race and gender in the Black community” (p. 12). The article implies that, perhaps, the *Defender* began rejecting traditional racial discourse and sought to move toward the new generation where race was less of an issue. The election exposed another division, however, that did refer to the importance of race. This schism occurred in the black community as black women were “unabashedly backing Sen. Hillary Clinton” and “excited about the possibility of having a woman in the White House” (p. 12). Ransom wrote that the problem was black women considering themselves as “female Blacks” and “ignoring the fact that before any X- or Y-chromosomes aligned themselves to form their gender, their Black great-grandfather and great-grandmother set their race for them” (p. 12). While Ransom’s editorials suggest two different ideas about the role of race in Senator Obama’s campaign, the coverage overall shows that the *Defender* sought to turn away from the Senator Clinton and move their focus to Senator Obama.

The *Defender* continued to demonstrate that Senator Obama, not Senator Clinton, was its candidate. February 1, 2008, the *Defender* officially endorsed Senator Obama, writing in an editorial titled “Obama is right for America” that the candidate was the “best candidate to win

the White House and would make the best president of the United States” because he could “visualize a nation that lives up to the true meaning of its character” and was a “uniting force by bringing previously disenfranchised voters [and] previously apathetic voters back into the political discourse (p. 11). On February 7, Susan Eisenhower (2008) wrote that Senator Obama was a “man who [could] salve our national wounds and both inspire and pursue genuine bipartisan cooperation” (p. 7). Thus, the *Defender* elevated Senator Obama by portraying him not as a black candidate, but a political candidate who was a “healer” and “unifier.” On February 27, 2008, the *Defender* suggested that Senator Obama was possibly a “godsend, meaning when God’s hand is in the equation—regardless of the resistance to change—change is inevitable” (Rolfe, 2008, p. 38). The coverage of Senator Obama’s campaign signified that his integration and unifying message would allow him to win the presidency. As a result, the *Defender* elevated him to a candidate who could heal the nation.

Can Jackson Win?

Unlike the *Defender*’s enthusiastic coverage of Senator Obama’s, the coverage of Reverend Jackson’s largely focused on answering one question: Can he win? While the *Defender* attempted to elevate Reverend Jackson, coverage suggested that his racial past would limit his chances of winning. Later in the campaign, however, the *Defender* pointed out that Reverend Jackson was reaching more white voters, but coverage indicates that the newspaper remained skeptical. The *Defender*, however, attempted to continue elevating the candidate by shifting its focus to his campaign’s achievements.

While the *Defender* clearly sought to elevate Senator Obama above any other Democratic candidate, including past black presidential runners, in 1988 the newspaper was more cautious in its approach to Reverend Jackson’s campaign. Despite’s the *Defender*’s attempt to convey that Reverend Jackson was a new candidate in 1988 with a Rainbow Coalition message, in the

beginning of the primary elections it remained reluctant to completely embrace his candidacy. On December 29, 1987, Chinta Strausberg wrote in the lead of a news article that Representative William Lipinski had said America was not ready to elect a black president, asserted that Reverend Jackson could not win. One day later, guest columnist John Jacob (1987) wrote an editorial on the importance of developing policies for Hispanic and black voters (p. 16). The article did not focus on Reverend Jackson's ties to the black community, but assumed the candidate also needed to address the concerns of minorities. In an editorial published three months after Jackson had announced his presidential bid, the *Defender* argued that "since no one single candidate of either party [had] yet emerged from the magic phone booth, we have begun to worry that the race could go to the most dogged rather than the most able among them" (Means, 1988, p. 10). The editorial added that "only the preachers, Pat Robertson and Jesse Jackson, [had] a solid identifiable constituency – but they [couldn't] seem to budge beyond it" (p. 10). Overall, the *Defender* did not suggest that having the black constituency was bad for Reverend Jackson, but it was important for him to "budge" beyond it to ensure success in the primary election. The *Defender* implied that Reverend Jackson's racial past, would not allow him to effectively reach white voters.

In the beginning of the 1988 presidential campaign, the *Defender* questioned whether Reverend Jackson would move beyond the black community and prove his electability among white voters. In another editorial, however, a columnist argued that the mainstream media, cynics and experts had said Reverend Jackson could not win (Rockwell, 1988, p. 10). This editorial asserted that the mainstream media was skeptical about Reverend Jackson's ability to win. The *Defender*, however, tracked the same agenda in its news articles and editorials, also questioning the candidate's electability.

Beginning in February 1988, the coverage, however, had shifted, and the newspaper began conveying that Reverend Jackson could possibly win the Democratic nomination. Days before the Iowa caucuses in February, Chinta Strausberg used the deputy director of communication for Jackson's campaign as a source to demonstrate how well Jackson was beginning to do in the election: "[Pam] Smith said of all the presidential candidates, Jackson is running 11 percent in a state that has less than 2 percent Black voters" (1988, p. 1). The article reported that recent polls had demonstrated that Reverend Jackson could win and was expected to win several Southern states. On February 8, 1988, Reverend Jackson told Strausberg that he was 'the most viable candidate' and that he would win the Iowa caucuses with 'double digits' (Strausberg, 1988, p. 1). Despite the candidate's prediction, he finished fourth in Iowa, but told reporters at the *Defender* in another article that he would be "near the top of the pack in his bid to become the nation's first nominee for the Oval office" (Locke, 1988, p. 4). These articles mainly represent some of Jackson's favorable coverage. While many of these articles represented objective reporting, the words, phrases and tone suggest that the *Defender* was mainly interested in publishing positive accounts of Reverend Jackson's campaign. Strausberg reported that Reverend Jackson had expanded his support among white voters, suggesting he was beginning to prove his electability. On February 25, guest columnist Paul Rockwell (1988) wrote in the *Defender* that Reverend Jackson's economic plan was "sound," adding that the candidate was the only one to challenge "the corporate Goliaths that dominate our economy and culture" (p. 18). This editorial also represents favorable coverage that attempted to place Jackson above the other candidates. In March, Reverend Jackson's Illinois campaign manager Leon Finney told the *Defender* that 'Americans doubted that Jackson could run for president, but they had to give way to his victories in some of the whitest states in this nation' (Strausberg, 1988, p. 3). After winning five states on Super Tuesday, Finney told Strausberg that there would be a 'two-legged

race between Jackson and Dukakis' (1988, p. 1). While many of these accounts came from sources and not the *Defender*, they point to a particular type of coverage. Reverend Jackson's campaign coverage remained positive throughout the election; thus, the *Defender* helped the candidate create a new positive image.

Jackson's victories and accomplishments were examples of the *Defender's* positive coverage. On March 29, 1988 guest columnist Benjamin Chavis wrote in an editorial that Jackson's victory on Super Tuesday was a "victory not only for the Rainbow Coalition, but also for all those who believe in equal justice and freedom for all" (p. 10). He noted that "people who were previously locked out of the political process [were] included with such significant impact" (p. 10). Chavis wrote that Reverend Jackson had "unified African-American voters with Latino voters with progressive white voters with Native American and Asian-American voters" (p. 10). In the closing paragraph, the columnist urged the media and political pundits to stop asking whether Reverend Jackson could win. The *Defender* had changed its initial skepticism about Reverend Jackson's campaign, slowly demonstrating its support for the black candidate, but soon began to publish only the campaign's achievements.

Beginning in June—after it was clear that Governor Dukakis would be the Democratic nominee—the coverage, however, shifted to another question. The *Defender* had begun to explore whether Governor Dukakis would nominate Reverend Jackson for the Democratic vice presidential seat: "Will Jackson be offered the vice presidential slot, and, if so, will [he] accept?" (Strausberg, 1988, p. 1). Thus, the coverage shifted from exploring the chances of Reverend Jackson winning the presidential nomination to asking whether he would receive the "number two spot." In an article titled "Jesse is still in it," Strausberg (1988) wrote that the "undaunted Jesse L. Jackson again hinted he has earned consideration for the number two spot" (p. 1). In her use of the word "undaunted," Strausberg implied that Reverend Jackson would not

be stepping down and would continue to play a major role in the election. This major role was important for the black community because Reverend Jackson would continue to fight on behalf of his voters. On June 13, 1988, Reverend Jackson told a crowd in Chicago that he had earned a “No. 2 spot on the national ticket” and would “establish a political pact to make sure the Rainbow Coalition and the movement would not die,” according to the *Defender* (Strausberg, 1988, p. 1). Days before the convention and after Governor Dukakis chose Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen for the vice presidential slot, guest columnist Gus Savage (1988) argued that Governor Dukakis had “disrespected” black Americans and that he had not “seriously considered” Reverend Jackson for vice president (p. 10). Savage’s editorial was one among few that urged supporters to embrace Jackson: “If we do not stand up for Jesse now—then for whom will we stand? And, if not know—when? Indeed, to stand up for Jesse now, is to stand up for our party—because...the ticket will lose if he is not on it” (p. 10). Here, the writer acknowledged the power that Reverend Jackson had possessed in the election, partly because he was the only black candidate who represented the black community. Thus, for the *Defender*, race played a major role in the 1988 election.

Aside from exploring Reverend Jackson’s possible vice presidential nomination, the *Defender* also pointed out that he would play a major role during the Atlanta convention. On June 30, 1988, Strausberg reported that Reverend Jackson had planned to “spend time with his family and associates, ‘making critical’ decisions about his possible role as vice president, convention floor tactics and other platforms” (p. 1). On July 5, 1988, Strausberg reported on the pressure among Democratic leaders to make Reverend Jackson the vice presidential nominee: “There is a move afoot to apply pressure on Democratic leaders to appoint the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson as the vice presidential candidate on the fall ballot” (p. 3). On July 11, the *Defender* published an article titled “Jackson takes his action to Atlanta” and on July 12, the newspaper

reported that Governor Dukakis had insisted “he was not frustrated by . . . Jackson’s refusal to formally concede the race” (Strausberg, 1988, p.3; “Dukakis ends Western,” 1988, p. 8). These articles are important because they advanced the *Defender’s* goal to link Jackson to his Afrocentric message by demonstrating that he possessed power in Washington—especially, black political power, which elevated the black race but not America.

Elevate Senator Obama and the Black Community

Senator Obama’s assimilation and deracialized message symbolized his ability to win the presidency, and elevate the race and America. While the newspaper supported both candidates, it appeared to elevate Senator Obama to a higher status that labeled him the “healer.” While racial themes framed the news coverage of both candidates, the *Defender* suggested in many editorials that race was insignificant in Senator Obama’s campaign. This time the “right” black candidate would win the presidential seat. During this candidate’s campaign, the *Defender* advocated for him, suggesting that if black voters put him in the White House they would elevate the black race.

Senator Obama’s campaign signified a change in America, according to the *Defender*. Race predominantly framed his news coverage, but the *Defender* consistently pointed out that the campaign was more important than race. If the illinois senator won he would heal the nation and elevate the black community. The *Defender* did not question Senator Obama’s ability to win during the primaries in the beginning of 2008. On January 17, guest columnist Barbara Reynolds explored the significance of having the choice to elect a woman or black male for the presidential nomination: “As much as I admire Clinton, can I really vote for a white woman over a non-uncle-tom-kind of Black man for president of the U.S.?” (p. 9). Danny K. Davis wrote in an editorial on January 23, 2008 that his decision to support Senator Obama was an “easy one” and that he made that choice “in honor of [his] ancestors who survived the Middle Passage and made

their way to a new country with the hope that things would be better for them” (p. 7). These authors suggested that voting for Senator Obama would elevate themselves and the race.

In elevating Senator Obama, the *Defender* sought to use particular incidents to disprove the mainstream community once again. Shortly after Senator Obama was asked to denounce Louis Farrakhan’s endorsement early in the year, columnist Lou Ransom (2008) questioned the negative impact that Farrakhan had on black candidates running for president. He argued that the political community was playing “race politics” by repeatedly referring to Farrakhan’s endorsement. Ransom added that “no principled Black person, such as Obama, is going to allow the blatant ignorance of others to create discord in our community – especially for now... when we are closer than we have ever been in the history of this country to doing something many thought they wouldn’t live to see” (p. 11). Ransom’s editorial points to the idea that the *Defender* wanted to urge to the black community to ignore the mainstream public’s criticisms and put Senator Obama in the White House.

When the mainstream political community attacked Senator Obama, the *Defender* came to his rescue. In April, the senator made controversial remarks regarding voters in small rural towns, claiming that people were bitter about the economy and that some of them “grabbed hold of their guns for security” (Ransom, 2008, p. 17). Ransom agreed with Senator Obama, writing that he had been to “some of those bitter burbs and some even more bitter ‘burbs’... [and] felt the backlash from residents who feel that their economic condition is someone else’s fault,... where white teens scream racial epithets at a Black pedestrian” (p. 17). Thus, Senator Obama was not “out of touch,” as the Clinton and McCain campaigns claimed, according to Ransom. He asserted that the “Clintons and McCain [were] truly out of touch because they have misread that bitterness...[which] is fueling the movement for change that has propelled Obama to the lead of the Democratic race” (p. 17). Ransom referred to the candidate’s change message and elevated

him to a candidate who was in “touch” with Americans. Again, he sought to correct misrepresentations that claimed the candidate was an elitist who did not hold common ground with many American citizens. On May 21, 2008, Bill Fletcher reported that Senator Obama “was correct when he spoke about encountering bitterness among much of the white working class...a point that Rev. Jesse Jackson observed and spoke to both in ’84 and ’88 campaign” (p. 15). Thus, the *Defender* sought to elevate Senator Obama by conveying that the candidate was right while the political community was wrong.

The newspaper continued to convey that Senator Obama was right for the black community and America throughout the primary elections. Senator Obama had become the Democratic presumptive nominee in the summer of 2008, and the *Defender* continued to embrace him as the candidate for the general election. In June 2008, Senator Obama spoke in a church about issues facing the black community and called for black males to take responsibility for their families. Reverend Jackson responded to Senator Obama’s speech, claiming that Senator Obama was “talking down” to the black community. On July 16, Ransom wrote that “some Black people feel that Barack Obama can’t possibly represent Black people since he didn’t march with King and didn’t hail from the South and didn’t come out of a northern inner-city ghetto (and his mother was white)” and that it is only “talking down if you don’t think he’s Black enough to talk at all” (2008, p. 12). News coverage suggests that Senator Obama had risen above the status of Jackson; the *Defender* had strongly criticized Jackson’s negative comments about Obama, despite his long relationship with the black community. Long before the Democratic National Convention occurred in August of 2008, the *Defender* had chosen its candidate, an act that was subtle—if not absent—in 1988.

In addition, the *Defender* used the election to elevate the black community throughout the coverage of Senator Obama’s campaign. After the Super Tuesday primary elections in February

of 2008, the *Defender* wrote about the “power of the Black vote” and claimed that “Black folks came out to the polls . . . and they let their voices be heard (Jackson, 2008 p. 11). In this editorial, voting for Senator Obama meant black Americans were letting their “voices be heard.” On June 11, the newspaper claimed that the candidate belonged “to those thousands of young people...[and] those elderly blacks who suffered through years of Jim Crow and so many daunting obstacles to their right to vote” (Ransom, 2008, p. 11). Here, the article is consistent with the idea that the *Defender* would seek to elevate the race by ensuring that voting for Senator Obama would heal America’s racial past. Columnist Cheryl Jackson (2008) wrote in an editorial that Senator Obama’s victory was a “sign- a big, fat glowing neon sign with flashing yellow bulbs- of progress for Black America and for all of America” (p. 14). This progress elevated the black race and America. Jackson added that black Americans would have to “let some of the more contentious parts of our history roll off [their] backs—that is, if [they were] to maintain [their] sanity over the next several months” (p. 14). The newspaper urged the black community to support Senator Obama and celebrate history, but it also attempted to use the candidate’s victory as a symbol of progress for black Americans.

The *Defender* also sought to elevate Senator Obama and the black race by supporting his controversial pastor Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Despite his success, Senator Obama faced numerous dilemmas, which included his longtime pastor, whose sermons appeared in the mainstream media, propelling a controversy that lasted until early July. Reaching voters outside of the black community became more difficult once the Internet and major television networks repeatedly aired controversial snippets of Senator Obama’s pastor Reverend Jeremiah Wright in early March. The snippets consisted of Reverend Wright—who was Senator Obama’s pastor for twenty years, married Obama and Michelle, baptized their children and served as the candidate’s spiritual mentor—making controversial remarks in past sermons about the September 11 attacks,

America's foreign policies and accusing the U.S. government of inventing AIDS as a means of genocide in the black community. Despite the reaction of the mainstream media and the political community, the *Defender*, once again, took the side of Senator Obama and Reverend Wright. The newspaper continued to embrace Senator Obama, but it also agreed with Reverend Wright.

The *Defender* encouraged their readers to embrace Reverend Wright and support Senator Obama during the primary and general election. Many of the editorials separated Reverend Wright from Senator Obama, asking their readers not to side with either public figure. On April 30, the *Defender* published an editorial that encouraged the black community to say "enough for the effort to derail the Illinois senator's presidential bid" (p. 13). The newspaper claimed that "detractors from both parties [were] attempting to use Obama's two decade pastor-congregant relationship with Rev. Jeremiah Wright" and "it [was] past time for black voters to speak in unison to the Democratic National Committee, the major-television networks-including their cable colleagues and Clinton's campaign and tell them Rev. Wright's remarks are not what this campaign is about" (p. 13). The editorial also argued that Reverend Wright and his teachings "[were] to be examined and in many-if not most-instances, embraced; not reduced to errant sound bites" and contended that his presence in black community had been long and distinguished (p. 13). On March 26, Glenn Reedus wrote in another editorial that the black community knew and were remaining silent that "Rev. Wright's theological teachings [were] not new and began long before Obama gave thought to living in Chicago" (p. 17). The *Defender* clearly agreed with Senator Obama and Reverend Wright, while emphasizing that the pastor was not running for president and that Senator Obama was the candidate to put in the White House.

After Reverend Wright defended himself at a NAACP fundraising event in early May, the *Defender's* Executive Editor Lou Ransom questioned the mainstream public's sentiment about Reverend Wright: "While gas prices have soared through the roof, and jobs are being lost

and shipped overseas; while foreclosures continue to leave vast wastelands in many Black communities; while health care is unattainable for too many Black and poor people, and while the war in Iraq claims even more lives, five years after we declared victory, we're told Rev. Wright is wrong with America" (p. 14). Ransom argued that Reverend Wright could not help but to reiterate the same controversial remarks about the U.S. at the NAACP event because Wright believed these views "in his heart, and he stands by those beliefs, even as they further imperil the political fortunes of his parishioner" and that "he could not go away and shut up" (p. 14). The last sentence of the editorial emphasizes that Reverend Wright's name would not be on the ballot in November. Thus, the *Defender* urged the black community to separate the pastor from the candidate, but to embrace both. Writers argued that Reverend Wright's views came from an older black generation that was clearly different from Senator Obama's experiences. On March 19, Cheryle R. Jackson argued in an editorial that "Wright's experiences as a Black man in America, as Obama pointed out [in his race speech] were borne out of a different time, one marked by more blatant racial strife and hatred against Blacks that is in many ways still evident today" (p. 13). Even with the coverage of Reverend Wright and the criticisms piling against Senator Obama, the *Defender* attempted to provide meaning about the controversial pastor and Senator Obama for its readers—once, again creating an alternative public sphere for the black community in order to correct misrepresentations. Instead of tracking the mainstream public, the newspaper sought to explain Reverend Wright's sermons and agree with him, while still embracing and elevating Senator Obama's campaign.

Jackson vs. Dukakis and Obama vs. Clinton

Another theme that illustrated how the *Defender* covered Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama included the conflicts between the candidates and their opponents. Racial themes were embedded within this horse race coverage and addressed whether Reverend Jackson would steal

the white vote from Governor Dukakis and whether Senator Obama would take the black vote from Senator Clinton. In 1988, the *Defender* focused a portion of their coverage on how Reverend Jackson would win white voters in order to beat Governor Dukakis in the primary elections. The coverage often referred to the race for delegates as well. On April 4, 1988, Strausberg wrote that “Black people, white, Hispanic and women want [Jackson],” noting that “three days before the critical Tuesday Wisconsin primary polls showed Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis ahead of Jackson by 13 percent of the vote.” Strausberg added that Reverend Jackson’s aides said they were running “neck and neck” (p. 1). Articles began heightening the race for delegates and white votes, creating a tense race between a white candidate and his black opponent. Strausberg (1988) reported in another article one day later that Reverend Jackson had predicted he would win the Colorado caucuses based on the “strength of a strong white grassroots vote” (p. 1). The reporter also mentioned that Reverend Jackson had “made significant political inroads in white and ethnic communities since he entered the presidential race” (p. 1). Again, these articles are consistent with the expectation that the *Defender* would emphasize the positive aspect of Reverend Jackson’s campaign, while covering the election similarly to the mainstream press.

On April 5, 1988, the *Defender* reported in their lead sentence that Governor Dukakis held a wide lead over Reverend Jackson in Ohio. After finishing second in the Wisconsin primary on April 5, Jackson remained 250,000 popular votes ahead of Dukakis, according to an article in the *Defender* titled “Jesse pulls 25% of vote,” referring to the white vote in Wisconsin (Strausberg, 1988, p. 1). On April 7, Strausberg (1988) reported that Jackson claimed to reach beyond his solid base of black voters and hoped to beat Dukakis in the New York primary on April 19 (p. 1). These facts merely represent different ways that show how Reverend Jackson was receiving positive coverage about his campaign. On April 20, 1988, in an article titled “Jesse

2nd in NY” Strausberg wrote that “New York state’s white Roman Catholic and Jewish blocs of voters turned out their support for Mass. Gov. Michael Dukakis Tuesday, giving him the victory in their Democratic presidential primary, with Rev. Jesse L. Jackson pulling up second” (p. 1). Three paragraphs below Strausberg wrote: “Unable to narrow the gap that was seemingly titled in his favor earlier this week, Jackson’s strong support in the Black and Latino neighborhoods, particularly in New York City, has now turned the presidential pursuit into a two-man race” (p. 1). Again, the black vote was Reverend Jackson’s base, but this sentence suggests that he was having a difficult time receiving white votes. The newspaper attempted to illustrate that the 1988 presidential election was becoming a “two-man” race with the only black candidate running against the white male contender. Furthermore, by focusing on Reverend Jackson’s success with the minority vote, the newspaper implied that the candidate would have difficulty taking the white vote from Dukakis in the predominantly white cities of New York.

In its news coverage, the *Defender*, however, continued to present Reverend Jackson’s achievements and progress. News sources attempted to emphasize that Reverend Jackson was indeed winning in states with low black populations. Often these sources also criticized the mainstream media for “downplaying” Reverend Jackson’s wins in states where there were small black populations (Bratcher, 1988, p. 3). Certain phrases and sentences illustrating that Reverend Jackson possessed the ability to win white votes appeared throughout the coverage. An aide to the candidate’s campaign told the *Defender* in April that Reverend Jackson’s victories in Colorado and Wisconsin proved that he could receive major white support (p. 3). After losing the Pennsylvania primary to Governor Dukakis in late April, Leon Finney, an aide to Reverend Jackson’s campaign, told the *Defender* that Governor Dukakis ‘lost badly in Michigan and in the Super Tuesday states’ and added that the campaign was not over and “greater efforts” would be made to win or ‘hold their own’ in other races (Strausberg, 1988, p. 1). A few paragraphs later,

Strausberg quoted another source who said that Reverend Jackson was breaking barriers despite his loss in Pennsylvania (p. 5). In an article titled “Jesse plots strategy for final primary election drive” political writer Joseph Manowany (1988) wrote that after Reverend Jackson had clearly lost to Governor Dukakis by May, Jackson had been focusing on what he had accomplished (p. 4). Thus, while the *Defender* demonstrated the difficulty Reverend Jackson had with gaining white votes, the newspapers simultaneously illustrated—through the use of sources—that his campaign had made significant improvements since its 1984 campaign by appealing to even a small number of white voters.

In 1988, the *Defender* seemed to be interested in covering how much Reverend Jackson’s political career had progressed and how his political power had increased. Toward the end of the primary election, news coverage shifted its focus on the future relationship between Dukakis and Jackson, questioning whether Dukakis would reach out to the black community and urge that Jackson play a major role in the election. On May 2, the *Defender* reported that Jackson seemed “headed for a love feast at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta this July devoid of the suspenseful melodrama of four years ago over whether he would support the ticket” (“Dems set to embrace Jesse at convention,” 1988, p. 3). Thus, the newspaper tended to raise the stakes by placing special emphasis on whether Reverend Jackson would fight at the convention or concede and support Governor Dukakis. Guest columnist Manowany (1988) reported that the “key issue facing Jackson...was how to keep liberal issues at the forefront—and to avoid having his constituency ignored now that Dukakis can win the nomination without help from the civil rights leader” (p. 4). This article pushed Reverend Jackson to continue fighting for the black community although he would not win the nomination. Thus, Jackson was still an important figure in the political community, according to the *Defender*. Days before the convention, Strausberg (1988) wrote that a “cool Jackson vowed to take his fight for the presidency to the

July 18 Atlanta Democratic convention floor and play the process to the very end” (p. 1). On July 18, Strausberg (1988) reported that Reverend Jackson had “urged his supporters numbering almost 7 million voters to ‘hang on, and hang in’ and that “for his constituents he wants shared power and responsibilities at all levels and expansion of the Democratic Party” (p. 1). For the *Defender*, this political power symbolized progress, further elevating Jackson.

When Governor Dukakis rejected the pressure from the black political community to nominate Reverend Jackson for the vice presidency and, instead, accepted Senator Lloyd Bentsen, the *Defender* focused on the conflict between the black community and Governor Dukakis. This shift is consistent with the expectation that the *Defender* would seek to elevate the black community. The *Defender* wrote that aides were concerned about black voter apathy and that it was “speculated that Dukakis chose Bentsen to ‘reassure the white male voters in the South...who had abandoned the Democratic Party...’” according to published reports (“Dukakis tabs Bentsen,” 1988, p. 4). On July 14, 1988, Strausberg wrote that with Governor Dukakis’ nomination Reverend Jackson felt many of his supporters had been “locked out of the political process” (p. 3). Thus, part of the conflict consisted of the growing division between Governor Dukakis and the black community, caused by the failure to nominate Reverend Jackson for the second spot in the White House. The *Defender* also attempted to demonstrate that Reverend Jackson wanted a bigger role at the convention than what Governor Dukakis was willing to provide.

Similarly, in the 2008 primary election, the *Defender* focused on the conflict between Senator Obama and Hillary Clinton but this time, the newspaper focused on which candidate would receive the black vote. Race framed the coverage by showing how important the black vote was in the election. The Clintons, who had played a major role in the black community since 1992 when President Bill Clinton was elected, continued to fight for the black vote in 2008.

This time, however, Senator Hillary Clinton was running. On January 17, 2008, reporter Hazel Trice Edney wrote that both candidates were “headed for a rematch in South Carolina Jan. 26 where more than 40 percent Black Democratic voters will decide what happens next” (p. 6). The article also pointed out that Senator Clinton could become the first woman president, which “added intrigue to the contest, particularly since Black women, who comprised at least 30 percent of the Black vote, [were] expected to decide the contest in South Carolina” (p. 6). On January 24, 2008, James Clingman wrote that the black vote was “critical to this election” and added that “two Black billionaires, one for Clinton and one for Obama,” were attempting to persuade voters to vote for their candidate (p. 8). For the *Defender*, the black vote was essential to the election because it was important to convince the black community to vote for Senator Obama.

One day earlier, Cash Michaels wrote that the key to winning South Carolina was the black vote, claiming “Obama will need it, especially since his chief rival... is also making a strong bid for Black support” (p. 4). In an editorial published in the *Defender* on February 7, 2008, Ron Walters explained the fight for the black vote: “There have been questions about whether he could be competitive with the white vote, whether he could gain a larger share of the Hispanic vote and whether his large lead among Blacks would hold up. These questions are addressed in the context of the fact that he won 14 states to eight for Sen. Hillary Clinton on Super Tuesday” (p.8). These *Defender* articles sought to demonstrate that Senator Obama was winning convincingly. Walters added that white and Black voters would be moved by Obama’s “forward looking message of hope and change” rather than Hispanics, Asians or more conservative white voters (p. 8). Here, Walters points to Senator Obama’s deracialized strategy, which would attract a diverse group of voters, not only black Americans. By February—because of his victory in the Iowa caucuses in January— Senator Obama had begun receiving the

majority of black votes, outdoing Senator Clinton in most of the polls. Because of Senator Obama's early victory in Iowa, the *Defender* continued to elevate him by placing his status higher than Senator Clinton's throughout the campaign, emphasizing his ability to receive the black and steal the white vote as well as other minority voters.

The newspaper also responded to Senator Clinton's criticisms in several editorials. These opinion pieces accused President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton of injecting race politics into the campaign after Senator Obama won the Iowa caucuses. On January 21—after Billy Shaheen, Senator Clinton's New Hampshire co-chair, was fired in December for accusing Senator Obama of using cocaine—in an editorial titled "Race and the Clinton ploy," Ron Walters (2008) wrote about the impact of racial politics in the presidential race: "There is quite a bit of discussion about whether the elevation of race in the middle of the Democratic nomination campaign for president was an accident or done on purpose. Apparently, the purpose was to strike fear in the heart of some of Obama's voters on the day before the final Iowa debate, by suggesting that Republicans might 'swift boat' him by asking whether he smoked cocaine, sold it and etc." (p.10). In an editorial titled "Bill Clinton was never our first Black president," guest columnist George E. Curry (2008) wrote that "black people loved [Clinton] and with such unquestioned loyalty, the Clintons were confident that...Clinton would stroll to an easy primary victory in South Carolina, where Blacks made up half of the Democratic electorate...[but] nearly 80 percent of African Americans in South Carolina sent them packing" (p. 10). In order to further prove Senator Obama's electability, Curry pointed out that 72 percent of whites and 61 percent of blacks believed America was ready for a black president compared to the 63 percent of whites and blacks who said the country was ready for a female president. Arguably, *Defender* chose to point to these statistics in order to minimize Senator Clinton's standing in the Democratic race

and to elevate Senator Obama's. By highlighting the Illinois senator's victories, the *Defender* framed him positively and posited that he could win the presidency.

On February 8, Lou Ransom (2008) wrote that Senator Bill Clinton "seemed to actually think he was the first Black president," also noting that "he put his office in Harlem and hobnobs with members of the Congressional Black Caucus...and said the right things" (p. 11). In this editorial, Ransom argued that President Clinton "didn't deliver on most of the promise that his campaign offered, and, in his second term, we heard more about Whitewater and Jones Law and Monica and Jennifer and impeachment, and he was basically emasculated as a president" (p. 11). On March 5, 2008, Ransom wrote in an editorial that Senator Obama began attracting blue-collar voters, female voters, older voter, white male voters and Hispanic voters and began "outpolling" Senator Clinton among these demographics in Wisconsin, Illinois, Nevada, Virginia and Maryland (p. 8). Thus, by February, five months before the Democratic National Convention, the *Defender* had established that Senator Obama was the best and *right* candidate for the presidency, releasing the Clintons from their long-time hold on the black community.

Chapter 6 Discussion

From its inception, the black press has had different goals from the mainstream press. Furthermore, the *Defender* has a long history of playing a major role in the black community, advocating for civil rights and seeking to destroy all “American race prejudice” (“Defender Platform Since 1905,” 1988, p. 13). Because this newspaper has played such a role in the black community, this thesis sought to examine how the *Defender* provided meaning to its readers about two black candidates who ran twenty years apart with different political strategies. News coverage indicates that the *Defender* as a whole—not the reporters specifically—had certain goals when covering Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama’s campaigns.

Schuefele (1999) argues that media frames address “what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” as well as the frames that journalists use (p.106). Therefore, the *Defender* framed the issues in both campaigns for its readers; specifically, it addressed whether Reverend Jackson would win, and, if not, what role he would play in the 1988 elections. The newspaper framed Jackson as a new and more electable candidate in 1988, illuminating on the fact that he was more acceptable to white voters. During Senator Obama’s campaign, the *Defender* framed the issues around the fact that he was an electable black candidate who not only could win, but deserved to win black, white and minority votes. The newspaper also discredited the assertion that President Bill Clinton and Senator Hillary Clinton had a right to the black vote; therefore, the *Defender* elevated Senator Obama by minimizing Clinton’s standing in the race. In addition, news coverage criticized the mainstream media for attacking Reverend Jeremiah Wright. It merely supported Reverend Wright and sided with the pastor’s claims about race relations in America. Thus, race did frame the coverage. But for the remainder of Senator Obama’s coverage, the newspaper focused on advocating for the candidate, urging the black community to

vote for him and explaining what was at stake if black Americans did not vote for the Illinois candidate.

Previous literature suggests that the black press attempted to show white readers black Americans who were “upwardly mobile.” As a result, the black press established a public sphere where whites could see different perspectives of black Americans (Hutton, 1993). Hutton also discusses how black newspapers have attempted to elevate the black community while also addressing civil rights issues and black identity. One of the ways to elevate the black community included showing the inclusion of black Americans into the mainstream public. During Reverend Jackson’s campaign, the *Defender* presented him as a candidate whose race-centered perspective evolved to a more inclusive message. Thus, news coverage indicated that Reverend Jackson was a better candidate in 1988 because his message placed him within the mainstream public. Despite its initial skepticism, the *Defender’s* coverage emphasized Reverend Jackson’s political achievements, which is another example of how it attempted to elevate his campaign. These political achievements mostly showed that white voters were beginning to vote for Reverend Jackson; thus, his message was attempting to reach the mainstream public.

Another way in which the *Defender* elevated Reverend Jackson was to correct misrepresentations about his campaign in the mainstream media. The newspaper attempted to demonstrate that Reverend Jackson’s political power was another positive element of his campaign and a not a negative one. This political power demonstrated that a black candidate could reach far in a presidential race. While the *Defender* remained skeptical about Reverend Jackson’s chances of winning, news coverage implied that he was worthy of being president, but would not receive enough white votes to put him in office due to his association with black politics. The *Defender*, however, chose Senator Obama as *its* candidate, overwhelmingly embracing him. It sought to present Senator Obama as a non-racial candidate who could enter the

mainstream political community. Senator Obama's news coverage corrected any misrepresentations about the black community. The *Defender*, particularly, sought to correct the notion that a black politician could not win white votes. The coverage of the relationship between Reverend Jeremiah Wright and Senator Obama corrected misrepresentations about controversial black figures within mainstream media. The *Defender* also attempted to persuade its readers that Senator Obama was the better candidate, surpassing Senator Clinton. Thus, it minimized Clinton's influence within the black community and expanded Senator Obama's role.

Editorials and articles are consistent with the expectations that the *Defender* would seek to elevate the black candidates and their race. Coverage largely avoided objective reporting during Senator Obama's campaign; instead, it advocated for his election and aggressively pushed black citizens to vote for him. During Reverend Jackson's campaign coverage, the *Defender* presented both objective and favorable news articles and editorials. Most articles adopted objective but positive reports, while the editorials presented supportive viewpoints about Jackson's 1988 campaign. Much of the coverage during the 1988 campaign focuses on Reverend Jackson's campaign, while some articles focus on the other 1988 candidates. When the *Defender* covered Governor Dukakis, it addressed the growing division between the governor and the black community. For the *Defender*, the fact that Reverend Jackson had evolved into a more electable candidate in 1988 symbolized progress for the candidate and the race. The *Defender* used Reverend Jackson's progress, political power and achievements to elevate the candidate and the black race. Furthermore, the *Defender* supported both candidates, but elevated Senator Obama to a higher status, labeling him a "healer," while it labeled Jackson the "new" candidate. See below for a summary of the differences in the candidates' news coverage.

Table 1

The Defender's News Coverage of Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama's Campaigns

Coverage of Reverend Jackson	Coverage of Senator Obama
The New Jackson: Elevated Jackson as a new candidate	Elevated Obama to a "Healer"
Supported effort to reach white voters	"Political Movement" for all citizens
Supported human rights message	Supported deracialized message
Skepticism: Can Jackson win?	Electability: Obama can win
Chronicled achievements and progress throughout campaign	Chronicled achievements and progress throughout campaign
Objective reporting on Governor Dukakis	Opinionated coverage diminished Senator Clinton's standing in the race

Literature indicates that Reverend Jackson's 1984 campaign was propelled by the black community and the black church. In 1988, however, Reverend Jackson had adopted a broader message, which originated from his rainbow coalition. He attempted to reach minority groups outside of the black community as well as white Americans. The *Defender* did not completely cover Jackson through an Afro-centric perspective; rather, it introduced a "new Jackson" articulating a human rights message in 1988. This coverage shows that the *Defender* attempted to elevate Reverend Jackson by indicating that his 1988 campaign was progress for the black community. Reverend Jackson, however, remained heavily linked to the black community and black political power because of his long-time association with the civil rights era. The newspaper understood this connection and seemingly realized that Reverend Jackson could not win given his past associations with black politics, a phenomenon that has often been perceived

as threatening to non-black Americans. Reverend Jackson attempted to reach white voters, an act that the *Defender* praised while simultaneously suggesting his rainbow coalition would not work.

The *Defender* embraced Senator Obama's deracialized politics, framing him as a "healer" who could establish a new future for the black community and America. Senator Obama's lack of associations with the black community and civil rights allowed the *Defender* to show no hesitancy in supporting him because the newspaper understood he could be successful in attracting white voters—a constituency that has been crucial to any candidate running for the presidential seat. For this newspaper, Senator Obama's campaign proved that he was the "right" black candidate, who could reach white voters through his assimilation perspective. Furthermore, Reverend Jackson and Senator Obama's coverage is significant because it showed that the *Defender* possibly made a strategic decision in endorsing Senator Obama. The *Defender* made a decision to embrace the black candidate who could win the highest elected office in the U.S.

Furthermore, the newspaper recognized the need for candidates in 1988 to speak about concerns in the black community, but it seems that the *Defender* looked beyond race during Senator Obama's campaign. During Reverend Jackson's run, race predominantly framed the coverage. On July 20, 1988, the *Defender* published an editorial titled "The Black Press and the Black vote," writing that "We, from time to time, have to remind our friends and enemies that the Black Press has a big responsibility which we cannot meet if the candidates feel they can ignore Blacks without cause or reason" (p. 13). In this editorial, the *Defender* accused Tom Bradley—who had campaigned for governor in California—of "trying to escape the fact that he was a Black candidate" (p. 13). Senator Obama's deracialized political strategy, however, ensured the avoidance of racial discourse during the election. The newspaper referred to the 1984 election and how 90 percent of the black vote supported the Democratic nominee. In the last paragraph, the *Defender* wrote: "Let the Republicans and Democrats know that they ignore the

black vote at their peril” (p. 13). Perhaps, for the *Defender*, Reverend Jackson’s civil rights past and his 1984 campaign message were both positive and negative associations. These associations were good for the black community, but prevented his chances of winning the Democratic nomination of 1988. The editorial above is interesting when compared to the 2008 election. Senator Obama’s coverage is significant in that he had not spoken about race or the black community until March—which resulted from the controversy between the candidate and his pastor—but months before the black community and the *Defender* had embraced him as their candidate. Perhaps, the *Defender’s* strategy had changed twenty years after Jackson’s campaign. Senator Obama’s victory in Iowa, a predominantly white state, in January left no doubt that he could attract white voters. In several editorials the *Defender* suggested his ability to reach white voters symbolized that a black male could heal the country. Thus, the *Defender* suggested Senator Obama was the “right” black candidate who would inevitably elevate the black race.

The *Defender*, however, did acknowledge that the issue of race could possibly jeopardize Senator Obama’s campaign: “Surely, there are a bunch of Black folks who will cast their vote for Obama simply because he is Black. Race is still the overriding factor” (Ransom, 2008, p. 14). On March 26, 2008, Anthony Samad wrote in an article titled “Has race trumped hope?” that “race is about to trump hope and change, as we get down to the reality that Senator Obama has a chance to win” (p. 17). For much of the coverage, however, the *Defender* demonstrated that the 2008 election was not about race so much as it was about the *right* black male who could inspire and instill hope into millions of Americans. From the beginning of the primary election, the *Defender* began to replace not only the Clintons but also Reverend Jackson. The newspaper slowly washed its hands of its past and invited the future, Senator Obama and his deracialized political message, into the black community. As Lou Ransom and Ron Walters emphasized in their editorials, this election was not about race, it was about war and the many other issues

facing America. For the *Defender*, Senator Obama instilled a hope that not only saved America, but hope for the possibility of electing the right black candidate for the president of the United States. Not only did the *Defender* seek to elevate and endorse Senator Obama, but it also acted as a political institution that attempted to persuade its readers to support the right black candidate and uplift their community.

This study could be enhanced by interviewing reporters who worked for the *Defender* during both campaigns. The sample is limited because the thesis analyzes one newspaper's coverage during the primaries and not the general election. Further research should address structural factors within the *Defender* that may have impacted the news coverage. In this thesis, I found that Reverend Jackson's coverage included many more news articles than editorials. With Senator Obama's campaign, the majority of the coverage consisted of editorials. Perhaps, the *Defender* possessed the resources in 1988 to assign journalists to Reverend Jackson's campaign. In the twenty-year period between these two elections, it is possible that the structure of the *Defender* changed. Reporters who wrote for the *Defender* in 1988 may have not been on its staff in 2008. Also, other research could explore Reverend Jackson's 1984 campaign, which heavily focused on the black community and church. This campaign may have differed significantly compared to Senator Obama's 2008 campaign because the messages were significantly disparate. Reverend Jackson had a problem with Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan in 1984 just as Senator Obama did in 2008 with Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Thus, different comparisons may yield findings that would further reveal how race has impacted the political arena in America.

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Vita

Cristina Mislan was born a few miles outside of New Orleans, Louisiana, in a city called Gretna in 1984. Shortly after her birth, her family bought a house in St. Rose, Louisiana, a small city where she would live until eighteen years of age. Her family, however, moved frequently, so she also lived in Germany and Puerto Rico while she was still young. At five years old, her family returned to St. Rose, Louisiana. Like all the other children in this small city, she attended the local elementary and middle school. For high school, Mislan attended Destrehan High and graduated in May 2002. After high school, she enrolled at Louisiana State University and majored in English. Since Mislan was a young girl, she enjoyed writing fiction; thus, she decided to study creative writing. After graduating in December 2005, she decided to continue her education. She took short break and, in the fall of 2007, Mislan entered the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University as a master's student. In May 2009, Mislan graduated with her Master degree in mass communication and began the doctoral program at Pennsylvania State in the mass communication department in the fall of the same year.