

RHETORIC OF COMMONALITY: AN AFROCENTRIC ANALYSIS OF JESSE JACKSON'S
DISCOURSE AND PERFORMANCE AT THE 1984 AND 1988
DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Despite the vast research by rhetorical scholars on political communication, scant attention has been paid to contemporary black political speech, which is becoming increasingly present. The present study provides an analysis of Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 Democratic National Convention (DNC) discourse to discover how his rhetoric conforms to an Afrocentric rhetorical ideology. This study also examines how Jackson's performance of gender and race identity functions in the dominant American political sphere, employing three representative identities of black masculinity, the race man, the new black aesthetic, and the nigga. The significance of this study is punctuated by the idea Jackson used a culture-centered rhetorical approach to capture diverse audiences, when delivering speeches of major importance, while embracing his identity.

Through examining his most popular pieces of discourse from 1984 and 1988, this study first attempts to analyze Jackson's rhetoric using the method of rhetorical criticism, specifically, Afrocentricity to examine his speech text. Second, this study examines Jackson's rhetorical performance of his black masculine identity. As a result, Jackson's discourse and rhetorical performance of his identity offers implications concerning Afrocentricity and black masculinity.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the men and women, who have significantly influenced the man I have grown to be. In particular, my dad and uncles who not only taught me the meaning of integrity, but also the meaning of pride. I am also dedicating this thesis to the memory of my great-uncle Carlos, who succumbed to cancer during this process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Notable charismatic African American political leader, activist, and author Reverend Jesse L. Jackson said in his memoir *Straight From the Heart*, “In my preaching, teaching, and activism I have tried to illustrate that the issues of life flow primarily from the heart, not from the head, and that at the center of every political, economic, legal, and social issue is the spiritual, moral, and ethical dimension” (ix). As one of the most prolific speakers of the past four decades, Jackson has not only been the voice of numerous social issues, but also America’s voice of reason and justice when it comes to matters of equality and justice. With a career in activism spanning over fifty years Jackson draws upon his experience during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, political insight, and oratorical expertise as rhetorical tools to voice a call of unity between dominant groups and historically oppressed communities in the United States.

A prominent figure in the larger movement for human rights and social justice, Jackson is a Baptist minister and politician who ran two of the most successful bids for the Presidency by a black¹ candidate until 2008, when Senator Barack Obama was ultimately elected. Born in segregated South Carolina, at the height of Jim Crow, Jackson was not unfamiliar with adversity. As a product of the Jim Crow south, Jackson faced laws that systematically mandated segregation among the races and prevented blacks from advancing politically, economically, and socially despite rights granted by the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments. Noticing

¹ For the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen to use the term “black” when referring to the ethnicity of Jackson or other men of color of African descent. This was a conscious effort due to the varying connotations the term “African American” entails. The term, which encompass every person from the African continent, who now holds American (U.S.) citizenship garnered clarification, for included in the umbrella term of “African American” are people from various ethnic origins, including white and black.

the injustice of the system, Jackson began his career in activism as a student, seeking to desegregate the local public library in Greenville (SC). He then became involved in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) during the 1950s and 1960s, where he was recognized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a promising young activist. Having gained the attention of SCLC leaders, Jackson was eventually appointed to a leadership position within the organization. His experience and position within the SCLC placed him at the forefront of Chicago politics. Venturing into the political arena, Jackson became the most visible face of and recognizable voice for blacks in the 1980s (Jackson xi-xxiii).

Launching a campaign for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, Jackson promoted unity and social justice on a much grander scale. Delivering rousing addresses at both the 1984 and 1988 Democratic National Conventions (DNC), Jackson was introduced to a broader national audience, thus transforming him from "the preacher of peace" to a viable player in dominant U.S. politics. While his endeavors into presidential politics were unsuccessful, his ambitious campaigns and culminating convention addresses became rousing successes. Due to the historic tenor of both the campaigns and addresses, Jackson provided a tangible example of the benefits and rewards of hard work.

After embarking on a yearlong research project focusing on DNC addresses, I believe that Jackson's themes of hope and the ever-elusive American Dream seem to warrant further exploration into his most famous pieces of political discourse. Upon completion of this earlier project, I became fascinated with his ability to connect with various audiences through his uniquely distinctive presentational style. As an advocate for the disenfranchised and oppressed, who challenge the world to be unprejudiced on the basis of common ground, Jackson's rhetoric provides a message accessible to everyone regardless of race, socioeconomics, beliefs, and

culture. Although focusing on black rhetors and their political speech, I noticed throughout the course of the research process there was an inadequate amount of work examining how race and gender may affect political oratory delivered by black men in particular. This thesis attempts to fill this void by examining the intersectionality of race, political oratory, and the performativity of racialized gender through an analysis of Jackson's 1984 and 1988 DNC addresses. The purpose of this study is to show the ways in which Jackson's DNC rhetoric conforms to Afrocentric rhetorical ideology and how Jackson's performance of gender and race identity functions in the dominant American political sphere.

In the realm of political oratory, there are other famous examples of black rhetors, like King or Obama; however, no one has had an impact on black masculine discourse at the DNC like Jackson. By analyzing the presentation of blackness and masculinity through Jackson and his discourse, this thesis adds to the work of analyzing culture-centered norms and patterns in mainstream political speech. To understand why I have chosen Jackson and his DNC addresses as the subjects of my analysis, one must first be presented with the significance of Jackson's campaigns and addresses.

The 1984 presidential campaign cycle and DNC provided the dominant American political sphere with its first glimpse of a viable black male presidential candidate. By choosing Jackson to deliver the keynote address, the DNC essentially validated the presence of a black male voice in national politics. As the first black male to deliver the keynote at a major party nominating convention, Jackson provided the inventional resources for black male DNC speech. With the success Jackson's 1984 and 1988 addresses, a framework was established for other men of color to follow when delivering an address at the DNC. Upon investigation of Obama's speeches among others, I noticed those speeches employ the framework established by Jackson's

appearances at the DNC, using the same tropes and allegories to present their arguments.

Therefore, my study focuses on the initial presence of a black male keynote speaker at the DNC through the example of Jackson.

The presence of black male voices in the American political arena is not uncommon and in fact involves a long history of effectiveness. I argue that it is necessary to discuss the intersections of one's identity and its impact on culture-centered discourse and the performance of racialized gender in the American political sphere. The artifacts chosen for analysis are of significance because they not only allow for an examination of black political rhetoric, but also offer the opportunity to examine Jackson's performance of a version of black masculinity within a larger American context. Examining the intersections of Jackson's identity and performance allows for a multidimensional analysis of identity, "rather than examining gender, race, class, and nation as distinctive social hierarchies, intersectionality examines how they mutually construct each other" (Walker and Greene 62).

Conducting an analysis of this type using Afrocentricity² as the methodology allows me to further explore the ways that culture-centered communication practices are performed and function within mainstream political discourse. Examining Jackson and his discourse through these forms of rhetorical criticism, I explain how Jackson's discourse and performance fits an Afrocentric paradigm. However, before explaining how each methodology functions in this study, it is important to highlight the significance of a critical rhetorical approach.

In his article, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," Raymie McKerrow asserts, "As theory, a critical rhetoric examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world" (91). The assumption of this theory is that rhetoric provides a

² In his article, "Afrocentricity," Molefi Asante, "Afrocentricity is a paradigm based on the idea that African people should re-assert a sense of agency in order to achieve sanity" (2009). In essence, the concept advocates for a way of processing information from a black perspective.

means to reflect on the relationship between power and culture. In a later work entitled, “Critical Rhetoric in a Postmodern World,” McKerrow explains, the purpose of critical rhetoric is to “constantly challenge the status quo to be other than it is” (75). Concerned with creating innovative ways of examining society, a critical rhetorical approach offers the perfect macro lens for this analysis.

By analyzing Jackson’s discourse as well as his performance, this thesis asks the questions, how does Jackson’s discourse and performance reflect an Afrocentric paradigm, and how does the situational texture of his rhetoric allow for and constrain his performance of black masculinity? Discovering how culture-centered discourse and communication styles translate to the broader audience and their overwhelming acceptance of it provides for an interesting study. Additionally, in regard to the black political experience, some smaller, initial inquiries include: How does Jackson perform³ his version of black masculinity in the dominant political sphere? Using a culture-centered theory such as Afrocentricity, as the central method of analysis for this study, much can be learned about the rhetoric and performance of a figure whose legitimacy was built upon a career of social change for racial equality.

To aide in analyzing the performance of Jackson’s black masculine identity, the subject place of the black male in American society must be addressed. With their work on black masculine identity, psychologists Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson posit “being male and black has meant being psychologically castrated—rendered impotent in the economic, political, and social arenas that whites have historically dominated” (1). It is imperative to understand the significance of Majors and Billson’s assertion of the economic, political, and social castration of black men, for; Jackson offers a representation of a black man, who during

³ Regarding the word perform, this thesis relies on concepts within Judith Butler’s Theory of Performativity, which are addressed in Chapter Two.

his rise to political prominence had overcome this castration. Unlike many black males, he had achieved the social capital that is a particularly important element when determining who has the ability to be considered masculine. Without interrogating how gender, race, and cultural signifiers affect masculinity, we are left with a traditionally hegemonic view of what it means to be masculine.

In addition to studying Jackson's discourse, this study seeks to show the ways in which an Afrocentric methodology can be used to research black political discourse and performance of gender. This study attempts to achieve this through the use of Jackson's DNC addresses, by employing an Afrocentric lens along with how a particular context of genre may affect aspects of performance. I argue this study is relevant due to the increase of black voice in American politics and Jackson's ability to establish himself as a prominent American political figure. With the increasing number of black male politicians, such as President Barack Obama, Mayor Cory Booker, and Governor Deval Patrick, Jackson's presence at the DNC, during the 1980s served as inspiration for these men. Jackson's rise to political prominence is imperative for communication scholars to study, by examining how his rhetoric appeared to transcend race, class, and religion, while maintaining his roots to his blackness and the Civil Rights Movement, it could possibly provide implications for current black political rhetoric. The culture-centered contours of this study offers greater insight not only into Afrocentric rhetoric, but also how particular spaces and occasions may or may not affect the performative aspect of this discourse. The struggle to advance an African or black American culture oriented paradigm for studying rhetoric is challenging for it requires a complete reconceptualization of traditional approaches to analyzing rhetorical discourse. However daunting the task may be, as scholars of rhetoric, we must be open to evaluate discourse emphasizing culturally specific norms and patterns of communicating. The

symbolic presidential campaigns of Jackson have a particular rhetorical significance for contemporary studies regarding race and communication that these campaigns are uniquely suited for investigation.

In a political age where it seems the electorate is more concerned about the candidate's personal qualities, rather than her/his policies and positions on important social issues, Jackson's rhetoric allowed for the audience to recognize both. In this study, I argue that Jackson's incorporation of Afrocentric characteristics, with regard to his rhetoric and performance, in his DNC addresses aided in his ability to capture the audiences' attention. Analyzing the addresses to discover what elements of Afrocentricity are present aid in interpreting which of these elements transcends an Afrocentric or culture-centered ideology. I also argue that Jackson's particular performance of black masculinity is inextricably linked to Afrocentricity, due to the criteria set forth by the foremost scholar on Afrocentricity, Molefi Asante. However, because of the rhetorical situation, several limitations are placed on Jackson's specific performance of masculinity. Jackson and his speeches given at the DNC offer excellent case studies because they are not only regarded as two of the best speeches, but also provide a source for analyzing black performance of masculinity.

Plan of Study

Jackson's DNC discourse and performance represents a rhetorical cross-section of culture-centered and dominant discourse making it worthy of analysis. Examining the rhetorical strategies available to black political orators could have a significant impact on the legacy of these orators and the intersectionality of race and masculinity. Applying the theories of Afrocentricity and intersectionality to Jackson's discourse and performance at the DNC offers insight into the psychological location of Jackson.

Chapter One articulates the research questions, presents a justification of the texts and a rationale for the overall study, and touches briefly on the study's methodology. The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows. Chapter Two discusses previous research within the field of communication studies concerning Afrocentricity, masculinity, performativity, and intersectionality. Chapter Three provides a biographical and contextual analysis of Jackson's development and experiences as an activist and political figure through both primary and secondary work, also tracing the history of black voice at the DNC.

Chapter Four analyzes the discourse and performance of Jackson during the height of his political career. Through the examining of his most popular pieces of political discourse, I investigate how Afrocentric qualities of Jackson's rhetoric are received across the same situational space. Using Jackson's 1984 and 1988 DNC addresses, commonly referred to as "Common Ground" and the "David and Goliath" speeches, this chapter also explores the implications of Jackson's use of Afrocentric rhetorical influences on his discourse and performance of identity.

Chapter Five investigates how black masculinity influences communication styles and patterns of black politicians based on Jackson as a prototype. An examination of Jackson's influence attempts to discern whether he provided the inventional framework for DNC keynotes given by black political orators. Finally, Chapter Six offers my thoughts about Jackson's discourse in relation to Afrocentric ideals and black masculine influence upon his performance. This chapter concludes by returning to the research questions and describes the findings of the study and its possible limitations and implications and how it may direct future analysis of this type.

CHAPTER 2

TRACING THE LEGACY

The literature review for this thesis begins with an overview of research pertinent to the study of Jesse Jackson's discourse and the performance of racialized masculinity. With assistance from the literature reviewed for this study, I attempt to analyze how the intersections of Jackson's identity affect his DNC speeches. Analyses of Afrocentricity and Black masculinity often focus on the problems of each concept, with little attention paid to the cultural and social experiences that have inspired the inception of these concepts. However, due to the culture-centered nature of these notions, the exploration of cultural norms outside the dominant white perspective can provide valuable insight into the subject place of the black man in America. The initial methodological section of the literature review examines research regarding Afrocentricity as a mode of critical cultural analysis. Within this thesis, I argue that Jackson's identity and performance must be seen through an intersecting lens to discover how each element of his identity interacts. The literature review proceeds by discussing scholarship that situates the concepts of Afrocentricity, masculinity, and intersectionality.

To provide the importance of this study, this thesis must first establish the problems with traditional standards of communications. In his article, "Attitudes of Southern Democratic Party Activists toward Jesse Jackson: The Effects of the Local Context," Charles L. Prysby argues, when attempting to critique or analyze rhetorical acts by or specific African American rhetors, one should not apply Neo-European standards of evaluation (307). By applying Neo-European standards, one runs the risk of misinterpreting the message or messages with the message. In the same article, Prysby asserts that due to a lack of cultural awareness, critics must be delicate in

their approach of evaluating and labeling black communication patterns as different when applying methods established by a predominantly white culture. Making this argument, one can determine if this is an effort to combat conclusions that are false and of a stereotypical nature. Therefore, applying a culture-centered critique aids in combating conclusions of this type.

Afrocentricity

It is important to first apply the theory of Afrocentricity to Jackson's discourse and performance to emphasize the importance of understanding the Black oral tradition and Jackson's contribution to it. Afrocentricity, as a concept, was first introduced by Black Studies scholar Molefi Asante in his 1980 book, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*. The concept of Afrocentricity combines elements of philosophy, science, history, and mythology, which is founded upon principles of African heritage, for black Americans to stress their ancestry over the Eurocentric ideologies to which they have been subjected. Defining this ideology, Asante states, "Afrocentricity, means, literally, placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior" ("The Afrocentric Idea" 6). This method of analysis seeks to analyze information and the world from a black perspective. This paradigm proposes that culture is a fundamental part of research and acts as a pivotal dimension of understanding one's worldview. Later expanding on his notion of Afrocentricity, in *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Resistance*, Asante writes it is a "paradigm that transforms the African from the margins of his or her own history to the center of that history where the person becomes an agent of activity" (73). Thus, an Afrocentric paradigm serves as a method of gauging the social, political, and cultural position of black people from an internal perspective. An Afrocentric archetype emphasizes spirituality, value in interpersonal relationships, collectivism, and knowledge of the African subject.

When attempting to analyze black discourse using traditional methods of analysis, there is an overwhelming possibility for the misinterpretation of this discourse, for, western rhetoric focuses on the individual. Afrocentric rhetoric is collective and group welfare takes precedence over the individual needs and desires. Thus, an Afrocentric approach into the rhetoric of people of African descent would be more appropriate to achieve a holistic and comprehensive understanding of motivations and meanings. According to Asante, in order to centralize culture and prepare a study from an Afrocentric framework, the researcher must assume certain responsibilities. Clarifying Asante's task to the researcher in their article "Exploring Afrocentricity: An Analysis of the Discourse of Jesse Jackson," rhetorical scholars Felicia R. Walker and Deric M. Greene state, "The researcher must evaluate the rhetoric both ethically and aesthetically. The motives of the rhetor must also be considered to determine if there is a particular purpose to create harmony among the audience" (62). Related to this, in her book, *Afrocentric Visions*, communications professor Janice Hamlet notes that, Eurocentric and Afrocentric discourse differs because Eurocentric rhetoric focuses to persuade as opposed to Afrocentric rhetoric attempting to create harmony and balance among the audience. Hamlet argues because the rhetorical practices of black Americans are different from white Americans, "The critic should use the lens of African American culture to understand African American discourse. African American culture is dynamic, highly artistic, and emotional" (*Afrocentric Visions* 104). Afrocentric discourse conforms to and reflects the traditional communicative, stylistic and argumentative features of black culture. Hamlet further explains, "public speech in the Afrocentric perspective is 'a happening,' a dynamic activity that springs from the attitude of the speaker, the attitude and responses of the audience, and the out-comes both seek to

accomplish” (*Afrocentric Visions* 102). If the existence of a dynamic presence is lacking, meaning it becomes inviting and participatory, then the rhetoric is not Afrocentric.

In practice, Afrocentric philosophies are used to interpret and clarify issues in the search for understanding within the historical context connected with underrepresented groups and their plights which have been disregarded for generations. Popularizing the term, Asante states, “The objective of such a critical process is to determine the degree to which a writer or speaker, from a rhetorical standpoint, demonstrates centeredness with the African or African American cultural experience” (*The Afrocentric Idea* 97). Using the Afrocentric method to analyze the discourse and performance of Jackson, the following five general characteristics outlined by Asante must be applied:

1. The Afrocentric method considers that no phenomena can be apprehended adequately without locating it first. A *phenom* must be studied and analyzed in relationship to psychological time and space. It must always be located. This is the only way to investigate the complex interrelationships of science and art, design and execution, creation and maintenance, generation and tradition, and other areas bypassed by theory.
2. The Afrocentric method considers phenomena to be diverse, dynamic, and in motion and therefore it is necessary for a person to accurately note and record the location of phenomena even in the midst of fluctuations. This means that the investigator must know where he or she is standing in the process.
3. The Afrocentric method is a form of cultural criticism that examines etymological uses of words and terms in order to know the source of an author’s location. This allows us to intersect ideas with actions and actions with ideas on the basis of what is pejorative and ineffective and what is creative and transformative at the political and economic levels.
4. The Afrocentric method seeks to uncover the masks behind the rhetoric of power, privilege, and position in order to establish how principal myths create place. The method enthrones

critical reflection that reveals the perception of monolithic power as nothing but the projection of a cadre of adventurers.

5. The Afrocentric method locates the imaginative structure of a system of economics, bureau of politics, policy of government, expression of cultural form in the attitude, direction, and language of the *phenom*, be it text, institution, personality, interaction, or event. (Asante “Afrocentricity”)

Moreover, according to philosopher Adetokumbo Knowles-Borishade, *orature* must be analyzed within the parameters of African cultural ideas for this discourse to be considered Afrocentric. The theory of Afrocentrism is culturally specific; however, it does not carelessly eliminate other cultures from conversation. To be considered Afrocentric rhetoric must transcend cultural barriers. When applying Afrocentric rhetorical theory to the rhetoric of black politicians requires an examination and recognition of certain human discourse that emerges from the African Diaspora in a political context. An Afrocentric theory of discourse only makes sense when critiquing black discourse. The Afrocentric archetype is a ground-breaking shift in the thought process of blacks. In this way, Afrocentricity becomes a revolutionary idea because it studies ideas, concepts, events, personalities, and political and economic processes from a standpoint of black people as subjects and not as objects, basing all knowledge on the authentic interrogation of location.

Knowing the intent and purpose of an Afrocentric framework, the process of how the rhetor and the message functions. The three major components of the Afrocentric method are the rhetorical structure, rhetorical condition, and rhetorical function. The rhetor and his/her message can then be assessed for an existence of an Afrocentric presence. The aforementioned components are central to Afrocentricity when it is applied to rhetoric.

The first component of the Afrocentric method is that of the rhetorical structure, which seeks to decipher unarticulated meanings in words. According to rhetorical scholar Ronald

Jackson, in his article, “Toward an Afrocentric Methodology for Critical Assessment of Rhetoric,” the “Rhetoric of structure accomplishes its end regardless of altering stylistic elements” (151). Discourse that uses this rhetorical structural has a broader appeal and is accepted by members of various audiences. In the same article, Ronald Jackson asserts styling, rhythm, lyrical code, and Nommo as additional components of the rhetorical structure (151).

The second component in the Afrocentric method is the rhetorical condition, which relates to the limitations placed upon a rhetor in certain situations. To study the rhetorical condition is to study the mechanisms of the power structure at play. The final component is rhetorical function, which is the examination of how the rhetoric operates as a constructive discursive form. From an Afrocentric perspective, rhetoric functions as a call to action. Talking about the problems of society is not enough. The rhetor and the rhetoric are most successful when action is taken to rectify the problems. In practice, Afrocentric philosophies are used to interpret and clarify issues in the search for understanding within the historical context connected with underrepresented groups and their plights which have been disregarded for generations.

Masculinity

The term masculinity has been examined by various academic disciplines, including those situated in cultural studies departments. In his book, *The Men and the Boys*, sociologist Robert Connell explained how masculinity exists and functions in an American context: “Masculinities exist impersonally in culture as a subject position in the process of representation, in the structures of language and other symbol systems” (30). In an American context, masculine forms of identity exist within a hegemonic complex of politics, popular culture, and lived experience. Although masculinity exists within a hegemonic complex, Michael Kaufman reminds us that “Patriarchy exists as a system not simply of men’s power over women

but also of hierarchies of power among different groups of men and between different masculinities” (*Theorizing Masculinities* 145). Like race and feminist scholarship, early work on masculinity tends to promote essentialism.

Only concerning itself with the experience of the white heterosexual middle class man, these early works dealt with a homogenous male population. Over time, studies in masculinity began to account for the difference among those who identify as masculine. However Connell states:

To recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance, and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity. (*The Men and the Boys* 37)

Connell, while acknowledging the existence of multiple masculinities, asserts there are various relationships among these different masculinities, especially in the terms of hierarchy. He says, “Different masculinities do not sit side-by-side like dishes on a smorgasbord” (*The Men and the Boys* 10). In the article, “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity,” Carrigan, Connell, and Lee developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity to refer to the hierarchy of power among the various categories of those identifying as masculine. They explain this concept of masculinity as, “how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate dominance” (“Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity” 592). Nicholas Trujillo’s article about hegemonic masculinity in relation to legendary pitcher, Nolan Ryan, lists the five components of hegemonic masculinity: “physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship, and heterosexuality” (“Hegemonic Masculinity on the Mound: Media Representations of

Nolan Ryan and American Sports Culture” 291). With this version of masculinity, masculinity becomes much more than sex, incorporating class and sexuality to determine how one fits into this concept. The reality of this concept is that few men may actually embody this notion of masculinity. Thus, for scholar Michael Kimmel, manhood is defined as “this tension between the multiplicity of masculinities that collectively define American men’s actual experiences and this singular ‘hegemonic’ masculinity that is prescribed as the norm” (*Manhood in America: A Cultural History* 4). It is important to note that within these descriptions and definitions of masculinity the ideas reflected are regarding white masculinity as experienced from a middle class perspective.

In the evolution of masculinity in western contexts, there are elements that remain constant, which appears from the early twentieth century until present day. One constant element of masculinity that has withstood time is the notion of being a provider. However, after the Great Depression unemployment was widespread affecting men’s ability to provide for their families. Due to this downturn in the economy and employment, a new type of masculine provider was minted. Kimmel characterizes this new masculine provider in relation to his earning power/potential. Because women were now alongside men in the workplace, men could no longer use their leverage as the sole provider to prove their masculinity. Those men with families now focused on educating the next generation to be successful. Now, “masculinity could be redefined away from achievement in the public sphere and reconceived as the exterior manifestation of a certain inner sense of oneself” (*Manhood in America* 36). This change centered the concept of the masculine upon confidence in one’s abilities.

Again, after a major event in the history of the nation and the world, what it means to be masculine experienced another shift. This time the shift took place after WWII and celebrated

men who served in the military. Men involved in the war had the opportunity to prove their manhood by protecting their country, but this provided only temporary relief for men struggling to prove their masculinity (*Manhood in America* 164). However, it was also during this time that once again men saw themselves as fathers and it was “as fathers, not as employees nor even as soldiers, that they experienced the autonomy and control that had once marked [...] manhood” (*Manhood in America* 164). According Kimmel, the late twentieth century brought about more changes. The election of Bill Clinton as president signaled a new era and type of man. This figure had never served in the military and was educated and successful and married to an educated and successful woman who was seen as an equal. However, men once again embraced the image of a muscular man. Through the male body itself men would prove their masculinity, since the workplace was no longer available. Kimmel states, “American white men brought the promise of self-made masculinity, but its foundation has all but eroded” (“Rethinking ‘Masculinity’” 218). Although still an overtly white, heterosexual, middle class concept, with time the definitions and descriptions of masculinity has morphed to allow for the inclusion of those who do not fit the molds previously discussed. One of those morphs now included in the category of masculinity is black masculinity.

Black Masculinity

In the article, “Reconstructing Black Masculinity,” bell hooks addresses the role of black males in patriarchal writing, “Although the gendered politics of slavery denied black men the freedom to act as ‘men’ within the definition set by white norms, this notion of manhood did become the standard used to measure black male progress” (219). This is further evidence that black males followed the example of white men participating in patriarchy, through mimicry of notions of domination. Black masculinity as constructed and perpetuated by popular culture

underlies historical and social attitudes toward race, revealing power relationships between dominant and marginalized groups. As psychologist Jay C. Wade notes in “African American Men’s Gender Role Conflict: The Significance of Racial Identity,” the “norms set for White masculinity are also held out as gender ideals for African American men,” creating a double bind for black men, thus blocking them “from achieving certain aspects of the mainstream culture’s masculine ideal”(18). These ideals have forced black men to create various strategies to cope with or to perform their ideals of masculinity. These factors can be viewed as resistance to those traditional white norms. Oppositional practices, such as speech codes and gesturing, to traditional hegemonic norms have particular societal consequences for blacks. Black cultural critic Haki Madhubuti stated that Black men are “virtually landless, powerless, and moneyless in a land where white manhood is measured by such acquisitions” (“Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The Afrikan American Family in Transition: Essay in Discovery, Solution and Hope” 69). Discussing how one must view masculinity, sociologist James Messerschmidt says in *Nine Lives: Adolescent Masculinities, The Body, and Violence*, it must be viewed as “what people do under specific social structural constraints” (8). Thus, the black masculine identity is forced to define itself through the negotiation of these constraints placed upon it. According to Clyde W. Franklin II:

For a variety of reasons, basic tenets of what would become known as “American masculinity” evolved beyond the grasp of Black men during this period. This is not difficult to understand because the model of masculinity in America had been constructed by the patriarchal slave master system. (“Male Issues in Vocational Education” 5)

However, space often dictates and limits this performance of Black masculinity, which is an aspect of Black masculine performance that this study addresses.

Black Looks, by bell hooks, offers a more applicable structure for reconstructing black masculinity. Due to the failure of the ideal image of masculinity to meet the needs of black men, hooks calls for a, “break with hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being that block their capacity to see themselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe and invent themselves in ways that are liberatory” (2). For the black man to reconstruct his own version of masculinity, he must first move beyond the white hegemonic construct that controls the narrative of the masculine ideal. In his work on black masculinity, Herman Gray argues that “contemporary images of black masculinity continue to challenge hegemonic constructions of whiteness even as they rewrite and reproduce forms of patriarchal authority, enveloping some of its most disturbing aspects in black vernacular style and expressive performance” (“Black Masculinity and Visual Culture” 405).

Although, these contemporary images of black masculinity are somewhat revolutionary in their reclaiming of a black masculine identity, they are still performing and asserting hegemonic norms. In his book, *Am I Black Enough for You?*, Todd Boyd presents three distinct representations of black masculinity: the race man, the new black aesthetic, and the nigga. Boyd’s categories are representative of a cross-section of black men; each identity depicts different expressions and ideologies of black masculine identity. According to the work of Timothy Brown, the race man depicts an acceptable version of the black man, by providing an upwardly mobile example to younger generations (“Allen Iverson as America’s Most Wanted” 69). In the same article, Brown identifies those men that represent the new aesthetic and the nigga. Explaining the new aesthetic, Brown writes, “The new black aesthetic represents post-civil rights era individuals who seek individual power and access to the dominant culture” (69). This representation of black masculinity offers a view of the black individual, who has succeeded and now navigates within the dominant white society. However, despite the success of

this individual and his ability to exist in white society, he maintains a sense of his blackness. Unlike the race man, an individual who embodies the new aesthetic is not concerned with the success of the race; rather, he has adopted a more individualistic point of view. In stark contrast to the race man and the new aesthetic, is the nigga. Boyd explains this concept as:

The modern-day ‘nigga,’ having come to prominence through several cultural arenas including rap music, African American cinema, and professional sports, equally defies aspects of mainstream white culture, as well as the at times restrictive dimensions of status quo Black culture. (*Am I Black* ... 31)

Here, the nigga is counter-cultural while also repelling conforming to the ways of the dominant culture. How black men choose to negotiate and enact their version of masculinity reflects issues of culture clash between their black identity and those of the dominant culture. Professor and author Mark Anthony Neal explains the constant struggle between black masculine identities by writing: “While we embrace these identities as part of our being, we are also conscious of the fluidity of the communities to which we belong and the relative freedom to explore these identities, often playful at the expense of white onlookers, in ways that our parents could never conceive” (*New Black Man* 177).

Performing Black Masculinity

In situating the performative aspect of black masculinity, this thesis relies upon the theory of performative construction of identity. In her work, gender theorist Judith Butler discusses the ways in which one’s learned performance of femininity and masculinity are informed. She asserts “the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts” (“Performative Acts” 272). Butler’s theory of performativity serves as a starting point of analyzing Black masculine performance due to its focus on the performative characteristics of gender and its intersections. However, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler states, “It is

difficult to say precisely what performativity is not only because my own views on what “performativity” might mean have changed over time” (xiv). When discussing the performance of gender, Butler states, this act can be influenced by an individual decision but in most cases they “specify pre-existing cultural relations; they are rarely, if ever, radically original” (“Performative Acts” 277). These performances of gender have been acted out repeatedly, without much opposition. Therefore, these performances are validated. For Butler, gender identity is created by these performances. Adding race, this concept proves to be even more textured. Therefore, these performances of black masculinity are rooted in stereotypical images and behaviors learned through observation, allowing little to no room for individual interpretation of black masculine performance.

Being transferred into a concept of race, Butler concluded in her book *Gender Trouble* that it is unlikely that racial identity is constructed in the same manner as gender. However, one can ascertain certain similarities in the performance of both. The intersections of gender and race are inextricably linked and the performance of each has real implications upon the other. For the aspect of performing one’s gender is a double bind. When enacting this performance one is also performing various other aspects of their identity, like race and sexuality. This performance of a black masculine identity has varying looks. However, in an effort to attain a version of masculinity, black males have created or embraced their own version.

With their work on black masculine identity, Majors and Billson’s theory of “cool pose” explains how black males exist in direct contrast to white social institutions of masculinity, such as, taking the role of the provider and protector. Black men have not had consistent access to the social capital they need to fulfill their expected roles as masculine beings which has resulted in the development of their own version and performance of masculine identities. This version of

masculine performance is characterized by unique patterns of speech, walk, demeanor, dress and attitudinal features such as stoicism and the ability to remain calm under pressure. The performance of this identity is significant to understanding the black male's psychological place in American society.

Intersectionality

It is important to note that this thesis also incorporates the theory of intersectionality. Jackson's identity performance is based upon the intersections of itself, as with his rhetoric. The concept of intersectionality was first named by the Combahee River Collective, which was a Black feminist lesbian organization of activist and community leaders in the 1960s and 1970s ("A Black Feminist Statement" 13-22). Among the first to articulate this theory fully in a scholarly sense was legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw. Initially arguing that race and womanhood must be taken into account to gain an accurate depiction of black women lives, Crenshaw later clarified the notion in, *Mapping the Margins*, by concisely stating, the notion "considers how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism" (1243-4). Simply put, each aspect of their identities positively or adversely affects the other. In her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins explains the concept in the following manner, "Rather than examining gender, race, class, and nation as distinctive social hierarchies, intersectionality examines how they mutually construct each other" (62). The artifacts chosen for analysis are of significance because they not only allow for an examination of black political rhetoric, but also offer the opportunity to examine Jackson's performance of a version of black masculinity within a larger American context and how the intersections of his identities inform his performance and rhetoric. Although this thesis posits performance and

rhetoric as two separate entities, rhetoric in essence is what is being communicated through words, body language, and one's presence.

The intersections of identities create social positions that shape the individual in terms of experiences of oneself and of possibilities of agency. Thus, the development of the concept has given rise to a concept of intersectional identity. According to feminist critic and philosopher Diana Meyers, "The idea of intersectional identity is premised on the general philosophical thesis that who one is depends on one's social experience" (*Intersectional Identity and the Authentic Self* 153). The social construction of intersectional identity depends on social experiences and these experiences are shaped by social categories. Relating intersectionality to everyday experiences, in their article entitled "Intersectionality," professors Ann Phoenix and Pamela Pattynama states, "Intersectionality is thus as a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it" (187). While the concept initially focused on how gender and race intersect, in the lives of women, intersectionality can be applied to how one's identity groups influence their lived experiences. Situational spaces can also influence how one's identity is performed, therefore, a genre critique of the DNC is important to this study.

Genre and Generic Criticism

Also informing this thesis is the critique of the rhetorical genre. The term "genre" itself connotes sameness in kind, type, or form. Writing on generic criticism in her book *Rhetorical Criticism*, Sonja Foss defines a rhetorical genre as, "a constellation, fusion, or clustering of three different kinds of elements so that a unique kind of rhetorical artifact is created" (110). These elements as prescribed by Foss are situational requirements or "the perception of conditions in a situation that calls forth particular kinds of rhetorical responses," substantive (the content of the

rhetoric) and stylistic (the form of the content) characteristics of the rhetoric; the organizing principle, i.e. the internal dynamic of the constellation that is formed by both the situation and the two characteristics (*Rhetorical Criticism* 111-2).

First used by Edwin Black, in 1965, genre criticism has evolved to enhance how people understand the rhetorical genre. In their essay, *On Rhetorical Genre: An Organizing Principle*, rhetoricians Harold and Linkugel writes, “rhetorical genres stem from organizing principles found in recurring situations that generate discourse characterized by a family of common factors” (263). They expand this notion by identifying the four perspectives used as a method to classify a genre. These classifications are de facto, structural, motivational, and the archetypal. De facto classifications are based on observations and are usually ceremonial in nature. Using a bit more rigor, structural classifications seek to determine and reveal the patterns and the use of language. The duos third perspective is the motivational, which focuses on the interaction, the rhetor and situational factors. The final perspective is the archetypal, which draws upon a universally recognized image to convey a message. Images used here are usually steeped in history and conveys the same meaning to all members of the audience.

By addressing the discourse of presidential inaugurations, I hope to find characteristics that can be applied to national party rhetoric. In the article, “Inaugurating the Presidency,” rhetorical scholars Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Katherine Hall Jamieson state there are five elements, which distinguish presidential inaugural rhetoric from other genres; however, I believe these same elements can be applied to the national parties’ nominating conventions. These five elements are applicable because they serve the same purpose at the nominating conventions as they do at presidential inaugurations. Campbell and Jamieson prescribe these five elements:

1. Unifies the audience by reconstituting its members as “the people” who can witness and ratify this ceremony;

2. rehearses communal values drawn from the past;
3. sets forth the political principles that will govern the new administration;
4. demonstrates that the President appreciates the requirements and limitations of his executive functions; and
5. achieves these ends through means appropriate to epideictic address, i.e., while urging contemplation not action, focusing on the present while incorporating past and future, and praising the institution of the Presidency and the values and form of the government of which it is a part. (396)

I am equating this genre of rhetoric to that given at the DNC because the keynote addresses at these conventions often follow this prescription. Jamieson's work on genre offers more about how rhetorical genres are formed and the constraints placed upon the rhetor due to the situational context of the rhetoric. She notes in the article, "Genre Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation," that "genres are shaped in response to a rhetor's perception of the expectations of the audience and the demands of the situation" (163). Therefore, the formation of rhetorical genres is based upon responses deemed successful in previous situations with which the audience is familiar. In the same article, Jamieson states, "Some rhetors are more constrained by genre than others because of their sense of the presentness of the past" (165). This idea is especially significant to this study of Jackson's discourse and performance at the DNC, not only because he is the first black male to give a keynote address, but also because of the history of oppression of blacks in U.S. politics.

Applying a genre critique to the study of Jackson's discourse and performance of identity at the DNC offers insight into how the rhetorical situation and genre constructs and constrains his rhetoric and performance. With the application of genre to Jackson's appearances at the DNC, this study may also provide evidence that he serves as a model for black men connecting to larger American audiences at political nomination ceremonies. Because genre dictates the

construction of the message, this study also gauges how genre affects Jackson's delivery of his message.

After reviewing the literature concerning Afrocentricity, masculinity, intersectionality, and genre it is important to apply these concepts to a layered theoretical framework with which to analyze the discourse and performance of Jesse Jackson at the DNC. First, Jackson's development as an activist and politician is traced to explain how they influenced his rhetoric and performance at the DNC. This project investigates how mainstream political discourse does not seek to acknowledge cultural modes of communicating; rather it places culture-centered discourse into genres that do not provide adequate classification. Second, elements of Afrocentricity and intersectionality are applied to Jackson's discourse and performance to gauge the influence of each. Finally, the lack of performance pieces about Black masculinities in the dominant political sphere must be addressed. This examination seeks to address Black masculine discourse and performance in the U.S. political arena.

CHAPTER 3

THE MAN, THE MYTH, AND THE PURSUIT OF A DREAM

This chapter provides context to situate Jackson's performance of masculinity through assessing his development and experiences as an activist and political figure. Introducing the life history of Jesse Jackson, this chapter is composed of academic scholarship to examine Jackson's evolution as a rhetor. In order to account for Jackson's transition from radical to mainstream political discourse, this examination traces his career from its conception to his highly politicized campaigns and rhetoric of 1984 and 1988, which serves as a backdrop in analyzing Jackson's performance of masculinity, while advocating for an Afrocentric view of this performance and rhetoric.

Born on October 8, 1941, as a product of an extramarital affair, to a 17 year-old mother and a well-respected former boxer father in his mid-30's, Jesse Louis Jackson was no stranger to adversity. From the absence of his biological father to the dire conditions that surrounded him growing up, Jackson developed a tough exterior. Like most blacks in the American South, Jackson learned with the complexion of his skin came limitations upon his life. He and other blacks were met with reminders of their inferior statuses daily, living in racially segregated areas of town without running water and attending segregated schools. One major influence on Jackson's life that always seemed to right the wrongs of society was religion. Despite the position of blacks in society, the church seemed to be the great equalizer. In *Jesse Jackson: A Biography*, biographer Roger Bruns posits, as a child Jackson became enamored by the presence and oratorical skills of his pastor delivering the gospel. By the time he was a teenager, he was

firm in his career choice to become a Baptist preacher (9-12). Listening to Jackson's delivery of a message, one can detect the influence of religion and the black church in his oratory. For instance, his use of call and response formulas, metaphors, and rhythm are all elements one would traditionally find in the rhetoric espoused black churches.

Seeing the way out of abject poverty and a life as a second-class citizen, Jackson knew education was imperative. After a stellar career as a high school football athlete, Jackson graduated from Greenville's Sterling High School in 1959, to later attend the University of Illinois on a football scholarship. Due to further instances of racial discrimination and faltering grades, Jackson left Illinois after his freshman year. Unbeknownst to Jackson, upon his return home, he would begin his career as a civil rights activist. Having been thrown out of the "whites only" Greenville Public Library before, Jackson and six others staged a sit-in and was eventually arrested for disorderly conduct (Bruns, *Jesse Jackson* 17). This was only the start to a lengthy political activism career due to the injustice he witnessed and experienced during his childhood and early adult life.

Transferring to North Carolina A&T, Jackson found what he had been searching for, a level of comfort and familiarity. Becoming ever-increasingly interested in civil rights and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Jackson modeled his activism after King's movement tactics and general philosophy of justice. As recalled in *Jesse Jackson and the Politics of Race*, with a leadership position in his school's chapter of Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Jackson began watch-ins, eat-ins, and wade-ins. Jackson's first foray in politics came when he abruptly took the podium at a 1963 Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) civil rights demonstration (Landass and Quinn 10). Recalling that speech, Jackson's mentor Samuel Proctor said, "He was aggressive and bodacious, but he matched it with intelligence and purpose" (*The Substance of*

Things Hoped For 109). Having observed this type of oratorical style from his childhood pastor, Jackson saw how it engaged the audience. After being recognized for all of his work by leaders within SCLC, he was appointed as the national director of Operation Breadbasket in 1967, which proved to be successful in part due to Jackson's leadership.

As the battles in Mississippi and Alabama, the boycotts and sit-ins, the freedom rides and protests died out, so temporarily did the rhetorical and political mission of the freedom movement. Focusing on localized issues, Jackson and King took up arms in Chicago. Advocating for minority representation in local government and housing reform, they challenged the old guard of Chicago politics (Bruns, *Jesse Jackson* 41). At this time the movement, still focusing on equality, somewhat shifted its purposes to employment equality. Jackson organized mass boycotts against local and national companies, including Coca-Cola and Burger King, in an effort to change hiring practices (Manning, "The Rainbow Coalition" 11). With the death of its leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the movement struggled to keep the momentum it once had.

Amid power struggles among leadership, Jackson resigned from the SCLC, in 1971, to found People United to Save Humanity (PUSH), an organization to secure economic freedom and pride amongst minorities (Bruns, *Jesse Jackson* 65-8). With the decline in popularity of the movement once led by King, groups such as the Black Panthers surfaced espousing rhetoric vastly different than King's non-violence message. Following the rhetoric of the time, Jackson's positions and discourse shifted from a more moderate position during the early 1960s, to a more radical rhetoric dealing with issues minorities faced in the 1970s. Jackson's sense of disillusionment with the freedom spawned this radical tone in his rhetoric (Reynolds 234). Relying upon personal experiences of discrimination as well as the stories of others, Jackson's radical rhetoric was a reminder of his early years as an activist.

During this period of disenchantment, Jackson's discourse evolved to include more insurrectionary rhetoric, which seemed to be appropriate with the changing of the time and social climate. However popular or effective Jackson's radical discourse had become, it only served to alienate him even more from the old guard of the Civil Rights Movement and mainstream America. In the end, Jackson had to realize that in order to improve the conditions of Blacks and other minority groups, he would need to adapt his rhetoric to appeal to a much broader and diverse audience. He would get the chance to make his plea on a national level, when he entered the 1984 Presidential campaign. Perhaps, his largest audience would be the night he addressed the Democratic National Convention.

Black Voice at the Democratic National Convention

The national nominating conventions are ideal sites for examining the phenomenon that is political communication and its effects on the American constituency. According to political communication scholar Mary Stuckey, these conventions serve as the candidates' point of introduction as their party's representative and are characterized by ceremony and ritual (*One Nation (Pretty Darn) Divided* 641). Adding to their original intentions to focus and make decisions about the party's platform and garner support for the candidates, who are endorsed by the party, these conventions have also become the site of confirmation. Relying upon clear visions of party identity, the national nominating conventions employ a combination of rhetorical elements and communication theories to appeal and connect to their audiences. Through the theories and rhetorical skills, political leaders at the conventions, convey to their audience the ideal nation to live in and what sorts of political actions are appropriate for that nation in their keynote address.

According to political scientist Stanley Greenberg, in *The Two Americas*, the Democratic nation is comprised of African Americans, increasing numbers of Latinos/Latinas, “super-educated women,” people who neither attend church nor own guns, unionized workers, and those who comfortably reside in increasingly cosmopolitan states (119-23). This level of diversity and willingness to change with the constant shift of America’s demographic is instrumental to the appeal of the Democratic Party. However, this has not always been the case. To understand how this mission of inclusivity has occurred within the Democratic Party, despite doing little for the black population, I briefly discuss the history of black influence upon partisan politics.

After the death of President Abraham Lincoln, Reconstruction was left up to a Republican controlled Congress and President Andrew Johnson, who was a Southern Democrat. Although serving as President of the United States, Johnson’s loyalty remained with the confederate states. Ultimately, setting the continued course of degradation suffered by black Americans, Johnson undermined multiple policies by pardoning thousands of former Confederates. Upon winning elections throughout the South, former members and supporters of the confederacy implemented policies that would further disenfranchise blacks on the state level. In “Black Politics at the National Republican and Democratic Conventions 1868-1972,” Walton and Gray states, “After the 1877 Presidential elections when the Republican Party sought to strengthen itself in the South independent of black, blacks began defecting to the Democratic Party” (274).

However, the progression in the acceptance of blacks within the Democratic Party was not rapid. According to political scientists Hanes Walton, Jr. and Vernon Gray, the first black delegate to attend the Democratic National Convention was A.P. Collins, in 1924. His presence was due to the absence of the white delegate he was the alternate for. He would be the only black

delegate to attend the convention until 1936 (“Black Politics” 274). For the first time during the 1936 campaign, black Americans were publicly embraced on the party’s national platform and black delegates were welcomed to participate at the Democratic National Convention (Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks* 70). Being welcomed into the party nationally was not without its problems.

Much like the Republican Party, the Democrats split into two factions along the lines of race. In an attempt to gain patronage as well as political office, blacks began to organize their own subsets of the Democratic Party. These groups emerged primarily as a protest against racial prejudice and discriminatory practices among white members of the party. In 1964, the DNC was confronted with the divisive nature of its party on the national stage with the appearance of two delegations from Mississippi. One was the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), which was a diverse party formed to challenge and unseat the members of the official state delegation. Seeking a voice at the convention, these delegates claimed to be the only true representatives of the people of Mississippi. Despite garnering enormous publicity, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party lost their bid to be officially seated. However, a compromise was reached, offering two at-large seats void of voting privileges. Failing at its primary goal of unseating Mississippi’s official delegation, the MFDP contributed to multiple reforms adopted by the DNC, publicizing the prejudiced political practices in Southern politics (Jensen and Hammerback, “Working In ‘Quiet Places’” 10).

By 1968, the number of black delegates had not only increased to 209, but they also played a much greater role in the proceedings. This was a year that energized black party members, especially the Congressional Black Caucus. They began to hold political strategy sessions around the nation to draft the black agenda (Walton and Gray, “Black Politics” 276). By

the time the convention convened in 1972, there were hundreds of black delegates. Including Representative Shirley Chisholm, who was the first black woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress. All of these events made it possible for Jesse Jackson to become the face and voice of black political leadership in the 1980's.

Realizing the Dream: Context of the 1984 Campaign

By 1984, Jackson and his rhetoric experienced a shift from the margins of the extreme political left into a broader mainstream political light. Advocating for a more inclusive and representative image for the Democratic Party, Jackson's rhetoric targeted those who existed on the margins of the American political system. However, this move into mainstream politics was not without challenges for Jackson. Developing a sort of rainbow coalition of these vastly differing groups would prove to be a daunting task. This coalition would be comprised of the politically marginalized: "Blacks, Hispanics, gay and lesbian organizations, environmentalists, peace and disarmament coalitions, feminists, liberal and anti-corporate populists" (Manning, "The Rainbow Coalition" 23). Jackson's strategy was to form a diverse group of muted voices representative of the United States.

In an effort to be inclusive of all groups, Jackson often ran the risk of offending those he was courting. Probably the most well-known instance of Jackson offending a group he appeared to advocate for was the comments he made about the Jewish community. Already suspicious of Jackson because of his support of Palestinian causes, Jewish communities became infuriated when he was overheard referring to Jews as "Hymie" and New York as "Hymietown" (Payne, "Black Reporters, White Press" 32). In an attack against Walter Mondale's campaign, Jackson criticized his choice of a running mate. Jackson asserted Mondale's choice of Geraldine Ferraro was a political ploy influenced by the increase membership of white women (Doener, "Politics

of Exclusion” 41). During his campaign, Jackson found he even had difficulty energizing the very people for whom he had once worked so hard to relay the message of justice and equality. Skeptical about supporting Jackson’s campaign, the leadership within civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP and Urban League claimed, “Jackson was a media performer who [was] short on follow through” (Tift, “PUSH Toward the Presidency” 34). However, he was still able to rouse his base of black clergy members and their congregations, who continued to view him as a country preacher (Kondracke, “The Jacksonian Persuasion” 15).

Although having gained popularity among various sects of the aforementioned groups, perhaps, Jackson’s biggest downfall was his lack of any serious financial backing. With little funding for commercials and newspaper advertisements, Jackson was fighting an uphill battle in a game where money has an important role (Manning, “The Rainbow Coalition” 21). Jackson was unable to overcome the controversial mistakes and money woes of the campaign trail, thus he was not elected as the first black president.

Context of the 1988 Campaign

By 1988, Jackson had become somewhat of a celebrity within the Democratic Party. He became known for his ability to speak his mind about race, equality, and class issues many of his contemporaries would not dare tackle. Jackson was in a unique position to initiate dialogue regarding hot button issues because he had distanced himself from those who control the party and its’ candidates. This ability to challenge the establishment about social issues and not cater to the wishes of advisors was likely due to his experiences along the 1984 campaign trail.

For those who previously thought Jackson was not a serious contender in the political realm, by the time the 1988 presidential campaign begun, Jackson had amassed an international and domestic policy resume. From securing the return of a captured U.S. pilot to advocating for

reform in international human rights, Jackson was more formidable than anyone had previously thought possible. Perhaps one of his most notable endeavors was meeting with Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev to discuss the treatment of the Soviet's Jewish population as well as the arms race (Randolph, "Can Jesse Jackson Win?" 155). As impressive as his international diplomacy had become, Jackson's domestic policies also appealed to a broader segment of the American populous. This time his platform was to target the interests of America's Heartland. In true Jackson fashion, his platform consisted of the quintessential socioeconomic and racial concerns. These concerns were accompanied by defense and international relations strategies. Still under a cloud of suspicion, Jackson had learned from his mistakes on the 1984 campaign trail. He was now a proponent for measures to end gender pay inequalities and encouraged better treatment of ethnic minorities throughout the world (Barnes, "Anything He Wants" 10).

Despite having accumulated a large following and proving himself as a diplomat, Jackson still faced one huge obstacle no other candidate would have to overcome. The issue Jackson would have to transcend was his racial identity. Although several members of the Democratic Party supported Jackson's candidacy, such as members of the Congressional Black Caucus, many were concerned that if he ran again, he would make it virtually impossible for any Democrat to be elected president in 1988 (Judis, "Black Donkey, White Elephant" 28). To combat possible disenchantment due to his race, Jackson's domestic policies focused on the economic oppressions shared by millions of Americans, regardless of race (Barnes, "Anything He Wants" 10). His policies helped to change the radical racially motivated image many previously held toward Jackson. Once again losing the Democratic presidential nomination, Jackson not only rallied his base, but also garnered the support of many other groups. Jackson's vision of a rainbow coalition was truly realized during the 1988 presidential campaign. Having

formed a diverse coalition Jackson illustrated that the needs and wants of the politically marginalized could no longer be ignored by the political establishment.

CHAPTER 4

AN AFROCENTRIC EVALUATION OF JESSE JACKSON'S STORIED DNC RHETORIC

An examination of the rhetorical strategies used in Jackson's 1984 and 1988 Democratic National Convention addresses is now possible given an outline of the historical and political realities he both faced and worked through (see Chapter Three). Throughout his groundbreaking and often controversial career, Jackson has always provided the American public with memorable quotations and speeches. As a master storyteller, his approach to gaining the attention of his audience becomes quite a work of rhetorical excellence. Upon hearing and/or reading Jackson's DNC addresses, one quickly becomes aware of his use of shared narratives to promote and lend credence to much larger social and policy-based issues. Although Jackson's audiences were demographically diverse, his messages often advocated for unity. Having been a central component of his career for decades, Jackson's cultural and racial heritage also influenced his rhetoric. This chapter offers a closer look at Jackson's DNC discourse of the 1980s, specifically, examining whether it functions under the tenets of Afrocentric discourse.

In his work about the application of an Afrocentric rhetorical methodology, rhetorical scholar Ronald Jackson states, "The struggle to advance an African-centered paradigm for studying rhetoric is challenging, for it requires a reconceptualization of all previously learned approaches" (*Toward an Afrocentric Methodology* 149). The concept and method of Afrocentricity chosen to explore Jackson's 1980s DNC discourse is best understood as a way to investigate occurrences by starting with Africa and African cultural norms as the crux of the study. In *Communicating Africa: Enabling Centricity for Intercultural Engagement*, Molefi Asante states, Afrocentricity is viewed as a "paradigm that transforms the African from the margins of his or her own history to the center of that history where the person becomes an agent

of activity” (73). In an Afrocentric orientation, consciousness of one’s self becomes particularly relevant in the perception and interaction with her/himself and others. According to scholar Jerome Schiele, “The Afrocentric paradigm is predicated on traditional African philosophical assumptions that emphasize the interconnectedness and interdependency of natural phenomena” (“Rethinking Organizations from an Afrocentric Viewpoint” 74). He emphasizes the concepts value in collectivism and interpersonal relations, as well as the individual as part of a collective. Although acknowledging the individual aspects of Afrocentricity, Schiele also states, “Afrocentrism gives performance to the group. The welfare of the group takes precedence over the welfare of the individuals” (77). Because an Afrocentric approach to rhetoric offers a more holistic understanding to discourse, one must analyze it differently, as well. Communication professor Janice D. Hamlet asserts, Afrocentric discourse is “dynamic activity that springs from the attitude of the speaker, the attitude and responses of the audience, and the outcomes both accomplish” (90).

In *The Afrocentric Idea*, Asante contends that seven central qualities comprise

Afrocentric discourse:

1. Afrocentric discourse celebrates its heritage and style.
2. Afrocentric discourse appreciates the language modes of others.
3. Afrocentric discourse attempts to bring about balance and harmony while focusing on reconciliation.
4. Afrocentric discourse contributes intellectually to the world’s history as a viable and distinct component of multiple realities.
5. Afrocentric discourse promotes community while celebrating diversity.
6. Afrocentric discourse respects pluralism and opposes Western imperialism.
7. Afrocentric discourse reflects traditional communication and stylistic features of Black culture.

Applying this approach of Afrocentricity to the rhetoric of Jesse Jackson provides a culture-centered analysis to these historic pieces of discourse. Historical and cultural foundations of

Afrocentric discourse must be considered when attempting to investigate how this type of culture-centered discourse impacts the listeners.

Perceived as one of the most charismatic speakers in American politics of the twentieth century, Jackson's 1980s era DNC appearances not only introduced him to the Democratic Party, nationally, but also to the national political stage. His oratorical expertise and long career as a social activist helped to establish Jackson as a credible political rhetor. This notion of credibility, according to rhetorical scholars Felicia Walker and Derrick Greene, is central to the success of any rhetor ("Exploring Afrocentricity: An Analysis of the Discourse of Jesse Jackson" 63). Having already garnered significant media attention for his historic bid for the presidency and controversial remarks, Jackson took the stage at the 1984 DNC championing unity. Jackson's message of unity illustrates the Afrocentric quality of interconnectedness among one's self and others. Throughout Jackson's DNC rhetoric, he tasks the audience members to interrogate themselves and find a sense of connectedness with others. Jackson's use of narratives and situational cues are deliberate and promote interconnectivity.

By using narratives and situational context, he constructs and appeals to the shared ideologies and experiences of his audience. According to rhetorical scholars John Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit:

Narratives are the storied forms of public discourse that extend the network of a community's public vocabulary by structuring the particular relationships between and among various characterizations [...] thus, narratives also provide the bridge to the final step by incorporating the ideal cultural values or ideographs that constitute a community. (*Crafting Equality...8*)

As with Lucaites and Condit's work on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s and Malcolm X's narratives as cultural resources and agents of change, this chapter illustrates how Jackson's DNC rhetoric of the 1980s fits an Afrocentric ideology and works to unify his audience. Although narratives and

vivid imagery are central tenets of African American discourse, Jackson utilizes them to appeal to demographically diverse audiences. By incorporating a culture-centered discourse, which is inclusive of all, Jackson's use of Afrocentric qualities not only resonate, but also respects the perspective of all cultures implicated in the discourse. The root of Afrocentricity is centricity itself, which according to Asante involves "discourse engagement that places all cultures in the center of their own particular histories as a way to a truly universal history" ("Communicating Africa" 74). By placing all cultures at the center of their own experiences, Jackson's use of narratives and shared ideologies almost becomes "American centric." Telling stories to simplify complex issues of economics, race, and social injustices, Jackson's discourse exhibits elements of what Asante refers to as centric narration. As posited by Asante, this narration includes the promotion of ethical values that moves people toward action, using their voices for social and economic justice, while combating racism and imperialism ("Communicating Africa" 74). Interrogating Jackson's DNC discourse of the 1980s, it becomes evident that he speaks from a position of centricity.

Centric Narration Represented in Jackson's DNC Discourse

In both his 1984 and 1988 DNC addresses, Jackson challenges his audience to examine the content of their character. In his 1984 address, he challenges his audience, in his introductory paragraph, to unite on a quest or "perfect mission." He states, "We are not a perfect people. Yet, we are called to a perfect mission. Our mission: to feed the hungry; to clothe the naked; to house the homeless; to teach the illiterate; to provide jobs for the jobless; and to choose the human race over the nuclear race (Jackson 1984). He believed this was the moral obligation of every citizen of the United States. Typical of nominating party speeches, Jackson incorporated moments within his speeches where he questions the ethical values of President Ronald Reagan, the

party's opponent. He accomplishes this questioning of Reagan's value system by saying the following, "He cuts energy assistance to the poor, cuts breakfast programs from children, cuts lunch programs from children, cuts job training from children, and then says to an empty table, let us pray" (Jackson 1984). By bringing attention to what he perceived to be the failed social policies of Reagan's first administration, Jackson provides examples of Reagan's ethical failures. Concluding his attack of Reagan's ethical failure as leader, he calls his audience to act by voting to elect the Democratic Party's nominee. The action encouraged often is viewed as a corrective of previous wrongs. Using his voice to advocate for social change and justice for those who have been wronged, Jackson's 1984 DNC address employs gives an account of the concerns common Americans face.

The last component of a centric narrative is to combat racism and imperialism. Still experiencing the effects of America's racially charged history; Jackson demonstrates how uniting diverse groups can succeed, if differences can just take a less significant role. Jackson stresses this point by offering a brief history of the racial progress of the Democratic Party. He begins with the opposition and final recognition of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party during the 1964 convention and concludes with the significance of him addressing the convention in 1984. Jackson states, "From Fannie Lou Hamer in Atlantic City in 1964 to the Rainbow Coalition in San Francisco today; from the Atlantic to the Pacific, we have experienced pain but progress, as we ended American apartheid laws" (1984). By providing a brief moment of reflective history, Jackson takes the audience on a journey experienced by African Americans seeking to have their concerns recognized. He ends with the theme of hope to inspire future posterity to remain hopeful that one day their dreams may come to fruition.

Proving to have been a successful formula, the centric narration of his 1984 address helped to solidify Jackson's place as a masterful political orator. Once again speaking at the DNC, Jackson's 1988 address encompassed the same centric narration. Applying the tenets of centric narration, Jackson's discourse once again resonated with the masses. Relatively unproven in the American political sphere prior to his captivating speech, going into the 1988 DNC, Jackson had become somewhat of a political rock star. As with the examination of the 1984 address, Jackson's 1988 address also is analyzed to demonstrate how Jackson used a centric narration to capture his audience.

Calling upon his audience to examine their character, Jackson appeals to them to find common ground for the common good of the nation. In doing so, typical of nominating party addresses, Jackson once again highlight the ethical failures of the Democratic Party's opponent. He talks about Reagan's economic policies, which kept the wealthy powerful and the poor impoverished. He suggests the ultimate failure Reaganomics was "Based on the belief that the rich had too much money -- too little money and the poor had too much" (Jackson 1984). He suggested Reagan's economic policies were typical of Robin Hood type practices, only in the reverse, where the middle class suffered the most. In an effort to combat these economic policies, Jackson calls for unity within the Democratic Party to cast their vote to elect their nominee, in his 1984 address. One thing that was different in 1988 was Jackson actually used his own story to relay the plight suffered by many Americans. Recalling his childhood, he provided a vivid illustration of working class life in the American South. It was a story of depicting abject poverty, with little to no expectation of escaping. Jackson's retelling of his life's story was not groundbreaking; however, it did provide a sense of hope to those American citizens facing a lifetime of adversity. His discourse illustrates a concern for the economically and socially

oppressed, but it also provides an example of a success story. Jackson's rhetoric is also influenced by the psychological state of his audience. All of these factors work together to garner a sense of interconnectedness among an extremely diverse populous.

Finally, as indicated in the tenets of centric narration, Jackson employs several anti-racist and anti-imperialistic moments. With the following expressions, he demonstrates the need to limit the role of racial and religious differences and stresses the importance of unifying the nation's citizenry based upon common ground. As he begins he states, "When I look out at this convention, I see the face of America: Red, Yellow, Brown, Black and White. We're all precious in God's sight, the real rainbow coalition." Now that Jackson's discourse has been deemed to be centric due to employing the characteristics of centric narration, this analysis of Jackson's 1980s DNC rhetoric continues by examining the extent of its Afrocentric qualities.

The Afrocentric Characteristics of the Rainbow Coalition and the Grounds of Commonality

The principles of Afrocentric rhetoric introduced by Asante combines "elements of philosophy, science, history, and mythology" (1988). All of the aforementioned elements work together to explain and shed light upon the human condition in a culture-centered manner. To determine if Jackson's rhetoric qualifies as Afrocentric, the seven tenets that comprise Afrocentric discourse, mentioned earlier in the chapter, must be present.

Under the essential characteristics, prescribed by Asante, Afrocentric discourse must first "revel in itself by celebrating its heritage and style" (Walker and Greene 62). Throughout Jackson's discourse at the DNC, he recalls significant instances in his life and American history to celebrate his heritage and stylistic influences. By not concerning itself with the comparison of cultural practices and traditions, Afrocentricity allows for communication to begin with one's own culture. Jackson's rhetoric celebrates the impact his cultural heritage has not only had on

him, but also America as a whole. He expresses this during the following passages, in 1984 he states:

From Fannie Lou Hamer in Atlantic City in 1964 to the Rainbow Coalition in San Francisco today; from the Atlantic to the Pacific, we have experienced pain but progress, as we ended American apartheid laws. We got public accommodations. We secured voting rights. We obtained open housing, as young people got the right to vote. We lost Malcolm, Martin, Medgar, Bobby, John, and Viola. The team that got us here must be expanded, not abandoned.
(1984)

In his 1988 DNC address, he continues this celebratory moment by again addressing the significant role black civil rights leaders had in ensuring justice and equality for future generations of minorities. These celebratory moments not only act to illustrate the progress of America's race relations, but also functions in an Afrocentric sense to establish pride in one's cultural heritage and its contribution to the human experience. Also central to the first tenet of Afrocentric discourse is style. The stylistic device used by Jackson in the previous passage is imagery. He uses this imagery to garner a vivid depiction of the sacrifices made by common Americans, so that dreams may be realized.

The second tenet of Afrocentric discourse is the appreciation of language modes of other cultures. Including the stories and concerns of groups from vastly differing backgrounds and experiences, Jackson's rhetoric not only embraces diversity, but also thrives on it. In doing so, he celebrates the many cultures that come together to comprise the American citizenry, with statements comparing America to a patchwork quilt. This metaphor was in an effort to provide a visual representation of the multiple cultural and ethnic groups, along with the multifaceted identities that compose the United States. By including these groups, Jackson legitimizes stories that may otherwise remain untold. Often, the stories of the dominant culture in a society tend to

become the master narrative, erasing those of the minority. This practice also serves to eliminate institutional hierarchies based upon racial and ethnic makeup.

One of the goals of politicized rhetoric is to unify the constituency under mutual interest, Afrocentric discourse furthers this notion by attempting to create balance and harmony within the discourse. Jackson's DNC addresses can be summarized by the theme of unification through shared human experiences. Discussing Afrocentric discourse, Hamlet states, "it is not so much persuasion that motivates a speaker, but the attainment of common ground, harmony and stability with the audience" (90). By creating a sense of commonality amongst members of the audience, Jackson's rhetoric works to highlight both the hopes and dreams of a better nation for all. In both speeches, Jackson calls upon young Americans, to "Exercise the right to dream. You must face reality that which is. But then dream of a reality that ought to be that must be [...]" (1984). He continued to espouse of a message about hopes and dreams in 1988, once again calling upon America to dream for the common good. He tasks America to, "dream of preachers who are concerned more about prophecy than profiteering. Dream on the high road with sound values" (1988). This message depicts a need to reunite people with their dreams and assure them that these dreams can be achieved through harmony and balance, advocating for what is morally right. Throughout his speeches, Jackson does not isolate any one particular group; rather, his messages are crafted to move all people toward a common purpose.

The fourth and fifth tenets of Afrocentric discourse emphasize its intellectual contribution to the world's history of multicultural realities, while simultaneously celebrating the concepts embrace of diversity. Acknowledging and celebrating the diverse cultural heritage of America and his audience, Jackson recalls moments where individuals from varying cultural backgrounds unified under a collective mission. In the introductory moments of his 1988 address, Jackson

recounts a pivotal moment in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. He tells the story of Jimmy Lee Jackson, Viola Liuzzo, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney; people who society often attempted to separate, dying together for the inalienable human rights of all. By referencing these events from the past, he furthers the knowledge of those in his audience who may not have known how members of two differing cultures worked together towards a common harmonious goal. Connecting this story of sacrifice to the goal at hand, Jackson solidified the significance of different socioeconomic, racial, religious, and ethnic groups coming together in support of finding common ground. In addition to recalling the story of slain civil rights activists, he shared various aspects of his personal story. Jackson's naming of the audience as the "rainbow coalition" was in effort to promote community and celebrate diversity. He states, "We sit here together, a rainbow, a coalition -- the sons and daughters of slavemasters and the sons and daughters of slaves, sitting together around a common table" (1988). The reference of the rainbow works to accept the differences brought by everyone to create a cohesive unit. Another instance where Jackson created harmony was when he recognized the peace efforts of various religious groups that composed his audience saying, "We are bound by Moses and Jesus, but also connected with Islam and Mohammed" (1984). The previous statements seek to acknowledge the progress that has been made since the 1960s, underscoring the composition of his audience, which consisted of people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Respecting pluralism and the benefits of having a diverse society, Afrocentric discourse rejects the expansion of Western imperialism. Across Jackson's DNC discourse, like later speeches, "He speaks of civil and human rights and invites his audiences to consider the idea of justice and America's role in that pursuit" (Walker and Greene 69). Throughout his speeches, he attacks the social and economic policies of those in charge by citing the mistreatment of minority

populations, such as the sick, impoverished, and working class. Discussing President Reagan's social policies Jackson states, "He cuts energy assistance to the poor, cuts breakfast programs from children, cuts lunch programs from children, cuts job training from children" (1984). He also calls for more minority representation in law-making and governing bodies by relaying, "We look from Virginia around to Texas, there's only one black Congressperson out of 115⁴. Nineteen years later, we're locked out of the Congress, the Senate and the Governor's mansion" (1984). This is in an effort to cull the idea that leadership and laws based solely on Western ideology⁵ best serves the citizens of America. He also discusses the mistreatment of those citizens of color by listing some of the injustices they face and by speaking to commonly held ideals of human and civil rights, Jackson outlines the positive attributes of diverse society and never shy's away from publicizing the negative aspects and the discriminatory practices of such diverse societies. In highlighting Reagan's neglect of these groups, he relays to the audience a message shaming the administration, further validating his type of an inclusive Afrocentric argument.

The Performative Aspect of Finding Common Ground amongst a Rainbow Coalition

The final quality of Afrocentric discourse is its reflective nature of traditional communicative stylistic features of Black culture. Because this final quality is immensely important to how Jackson's discourse is received and interpreted, it warrants its own discussion separate from the other tenets of this type of discourse. According to Ronald Jackson, "African American rhetoric is the manifestation of culture, which seeks to celebrate, sustain, develop, and introduce itself to history and humanity" (153). Like many African cultures, black American

⁴ Here, Jackson was referring to the number of congressmen from the southern states.

⁵ My use of the term "Western Ideology" is defined by the hegemonic nature of the U.S. public and other similar industrialized and developed nations that assume superiority of the majority group. In turn, this superiority asserts the cultural beliefs and behaviors of the dominant over minority groups in society.

culture is grounded in religion and oral tradition. Regarding the relationship between the two rhetorical cultures Asante states, “there are observable relationships in the substantive social fabric of language behaviors proverbs, riddles, dozens, call-in-response” (*The Afrocentric Idea* 21). He goes on to identify the West African languages he believes has most influenced black American linguistic styles, situating these linguistic influences around the countries of Niger and Congo.

Whether as a leader in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, a charismatic proponent of social change, or an effective negotiator for the United States, Jackson exemplifies a steadfast humanitarian intent on bringing all together regardless of race, gender, class, religion or sexual orientation. After gaining international recognition for his diplomatic efforts, Jackson’s political career catapulted. Taking advantage of his new-found political success, Jackson uses his experiences in the Civil Rights Movement and politics to help provide voices to those muted and underserved populations, who have historically existed along the margins. Despite having achieved international notoriety for his humanitarian efforts, perhaps, Jackson’s greatest oratorical influences have come from his background as a Baptist minister. Jackson’s discourse incorporates vivid imagery, rhyme, rhythm, narratives and repetition, which are elements often found in the rhetoric of the black church.

In an effort to build a sense of community among his audiences, Jackson’s application of Afrocentric qualities, whether intentional or not, served to garner unity amongst diverse groups. The communal qualities of Afrocentric rhetoric are essential to its success. Embodying a collective community consciousness of history and culture, Afrocentricity emphasizes interconnectedness. Although culturally specific to members of the African diaspora, it does not seek to overthrow the experiences and traditions of other cultures. Rather, it brings to light an

awareness of the human condition. The unique delivery elements of Afrocentric rhetoric work in concert to promote this unified sense of community.

Assisting in the delivery of unifying Jackson's audiences are stylistic features traditionally found in black discourse. The following elements are typically present: rhythm, soundin', stylin', storytelling, lyrical code, image making, and call and response. In addition to the previous elements, the concept of Nommo must also be understood for one to fully engage Afrocentric rhetoric. Nommo gives the story substance and styling to help the listener interact and understand the importance of the history. Author Janheinz Janh explains the concept of nommo as:

Nommo, the life force, is the fluid as such, a unity of spiritual-physical fluidity, giving life to everything, penetrating everything, causing everything. And since man has power over the word, it is he who directs the life force. Through the word, he receives it, shares it with other beings, and so fulfills the meaning of life... And since the word has this power, every word is an effective word, every word is binding. There is no 'harmless' noncommittal word. Every word has consequence. (*Muntu* 124-33)

In essence, Nommo acts as the tenor of the message providing the audience with the energy level needed to embrace the message. The delivery pattern of Nommo is an integral tactic used by African American rhetors to achieve the desired response of the audience.

The seven elements at the center of analyzing the delivery of Afrocentric rhetoric are essential to the concept. First, the rhythm of the speech must be appropriate for the occasion. An occasion such as the DNC requires a rhetor's address to be filled with passion and purpose. Jackson did not disappoint. He conveyed different messages throughout his address, and incorporated rhymes and rhythms ranging from a somber nature to fiery and fast paced. By incorporating rhythmic qualities in his DNC rhetoric, Jackson was coined "a master of bumper-sticker rhetoric" (Martz 22). This was not meant as a compliment; rather this term was used as a

way to highlight Jackson's more simplified delivery. However, the media's seeming disdain for Jackson's oratorical presentation was without merit. In essence, Jackson's bumper sticker rhetoric achieved its purpose of unifying his audience with chants like, "Keep hope alive" and "Common Ground." According to language theorist Walter J. Ong, "Rhythm aids recall" and is essential to the preservation of "memorable thoughts" (*Orality and Literacy* 32). Nommo, which is this supernatural force that directs unity among the audience, the speaker, and the message, assured Jackson's success. The rhythmic quality of his DNC discourse made his messages memorable.

The second element is that of soundin' or signifying. In *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains black patterns of signification as a "complex act of language, which signifies upon both formal language uses and its conventions, conventions established, at least officially, by middle class white people" (47). Essentially, due to their lack of a voice in dominant society, blacks created meaning for words differing from those of whites to relay their experiences. We learned from the concept of Nommo, the word is a living force and has power. For oral cultures, such as black rhetorical cultures this notion of the word as a living being is best explained by Claudia Mitchell-Kernan. She states, "The Black concept of signifying [which] incorporates essentially a folk notion that dictionary entries for words are not always sufficient for interpreting meanings or messages, or that meanings go beyond such interpretations" (Gates 289). However, these elaborate explanations of signifying only further complicate the definition. Therefore, this analysis relies upon Roger D. Abrahams' definition. He suggests the origins of signifying, may in fact, lie within the cultural production of people of African descent. Terms and messages that employ the use of signification can be difficult to understand for those outside of a particular culture. Not

just about the verbal, Abrahams states signifying, “Also it can denote speaking with the hands and eyes, and in this respect encompasses a whole complex of expressions and gestures” (*African American Literary*260). Simply put, signifying is a practice of communication by members of black communities indirectly arguing and/or persuading through indirect verbal responses of gestures. Signifying includes loud-talking, testifying, calling out (of one’s name), rapping, and playing the dozens. Although signifying involves use of codified language, Jackson relied upon the traditional American English to relay his message. In both addresses, Afrocentric patterns of signification were used to unite audiences and remind them of the problems they shared as a result of Reaganomics. Probably the most noticeable pattern of signification is his use of the phrase “Common Ground.” The alliteration in the phrase, “The greater good is the common good” (Jackson), works to reiterate the importance of unity. The phrase “Common Ground” also serves as a method of call and response and/or testifying.

Stylin’ is the combination of enthusiasm and rhythm the speaker uses to garner the audience’s attention. According to Ronald Jackson, stylin’ “is usually accomplished through the vocal variety, resonance, percussive, epanaphora, volume, pitch, rate, and tone” (154). Another stylistic element is the use of repetition. The most visible representation of this use of stylin’ is the performances of black preachers. With his background as a preacher, Jackson has masterfully employed stylin’ throughout his oratorical career. Thus, audiences have come to know Jackson for his stylistic devices. Jackson’s trademark style integrates repetitious catch phrases, rhymes, and metaphors. Through the repetition of phrase such as “Common Ground,” “Keep hope alive,” and “I understand,” Jackson was able to engage his audiences, making his speeches almost conversations. The combination of these elements work in concert to deliver a message full of stylistic elements, regardless of how substantive the message may be.

The next element pertinent to the analysis of Afrocentric discourse is storytelling. Ronald Jackson states, “It is seen in the African community as a preservation of oral tradition, and is often used by a rhetor to arouse epic memory” (154). Storytelling, whether fact or fiction, acts as a method to relay messages illustrating the human experience often steeped in lessons about life. Jackson’s DNC discourse could not have functioned without the art of referencing the stories of real people. Through these stories, he challenged the audience to think about the implications of each of their actions upon their fellow man. Using his own story in 1988, Jackson provided evidence of the American dream, proving the poor and working class can make it. He says, “I was born in the slum, but the slum was not born in me. And it wasn’t born in you, and you can make it” (1988).

The lyrical code acts in conjunction with storytelling to provide a sense of community among the speaker and the audience. The speaker uses words, phrases, and stories that are commonplace within a culture when speaking to their audience. The sixth element, image-making, then considers the legends and heroes of a society to establish a sense of pride within one’s culture (Ronald Jackson 155). The combination of the lyrical code and image-making drew his audiences together and reminded them of their shared historical suffering, the same patterns used throughout his career as a minister, Jackson drew upon them to bring audience members together during the 1984 and 1988 DNC and reminded them of shared concerns. As his address in 1984, Jackson once again relied upon his connection to the Civil Rights Movement indicating his privilege of following in the steps of Civil Rights icons such as, Rosa Parks, to fulfill the Afrocentric elements of the lyrical code and image-making in 1988. He honors Parks in his introduction saying, “All of us who are here think that we are seated. But we’re really standing on someone’s shoulders [...] Mrs. Rosa Parks, the mother of the civil rights movement (1988).

The final element is call and response, which incorporates all of the aforementioned elements to form an interactive experience. Due to the orality of black communication patterns, most African American discourse is meant to be participatory. Interaction between the rhetor and the audience is strongly encouraged and almost expected. Call and response is the notion that the audience would affirm the rhetor's message by clapping, laughing, nodding, or even yelling phrases of affirmation at the rhetor. All of the elements of Afrocentric discourse coordinate to make the message a powerful force, moving the audience toward a shared sense of being. Repetition of phrases such as, "Rainbow Coalition," "Up with hope and down with dope," and "Common Ground" established a rhythm within his speeches. By repeatedly saying these phrases, Jackson emphasized shared values and dreams. Thus, these rhythmic chants became moments of call and response inviting the audience to participate. His 1984 address was more subdued and call and response was not as prominent as in the 1988 address. Throughout "Common Ground and Common Sense," call and response formulas were used to unite Jackson to members of his audience as well as to each other. Probably the most well-known expression is "Common Ground."

Inciting unity and a sense of commonality, Jackson appeals to the audience on several dimensions. He harkens to the potential religious and spiritual identities within the audience by highlighting the importance of Jerusalem and its storied history of diverse religious groups such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam co-existing. The story of Jerusalem became an important moment in the speech when he states, "it provided a crossroads where different peoples met, different cultures, and different civilizations could meet and find *common ground*" (1988). Contemporarily speaking, Jackson then equates the multicultural nature of Jerusalem to the dense and diverse nature of the city of New York. Relying on the story of Jerusalem to provide

evidence of cultures living in the same space, Jackson calls on Americans to unite on the premise of “common ground”.

Through this repetition, Jackson created a sense of a community being drawn together for a common good. In this excerpt of “Common Ground and Common Sense,” black patterns of signification were used to remind listeners of the problems they shared. He also used a biblical reference to Jerusalem, to further establish a sense of commonality, which represents a community of different groups and religions unifying for the common good of humanity. In the way Jerusalem acts as an intersection of diversity for world religions, so, too, does New York boast the same ethos in an American cultural context. He asks, “What makes New York so special?” (1988). It is not the skyscrapers or the entertainment value, but rather it is “many people, many cultures, many languages with one thing in common: They yearn to breathe free” (Jackson). The City of New York served as a beacon of hope for all in search of a land that offered the promise of opportunity indiscriminate of color, creed, or religion from various nations and backgrounds. Similarly, Jackson’s quilt metaphor in his 1984 address echoed his effort to create an inclusive message by addressing the diverse nature of the country. It unfolds in this fashion, “America is not like a blanket one piece of unbroken cloth [...] America is more like a quilt: many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, all woven and held together by a common thread” (Jackson). He provides a list of the many patches of this American quilt, acknowledging its’ multicultural and ethnic dimension. The list includes “The white, the Hispanic, the black, the Arab, the Jew, the woman, the native American, the small farmer, the businessperson, the environmentalist, the peace activist, the young, the old, the lesbian, the gay, and the disabled” (Jackson). Each metaphor describes a pluralistic America and exhibits how all groups can live together successfully while maintaining their racial and ethnic heritages. In the

same speech, Jackson used call and response to tie his experiences with those of his audience members. As he recalled his childhood experiences, “I understand” became the refrain that assured the audience the American dream was possible:

I understand. You see me on TV, but you don't know the me that makes me, me. They wonder, “Why does Jesse run?” because they see me running for the White House. They don't see the house I'm running from. I have a story. I wasn't always on television. Writers were not always outside my door. When I was born late one afternoon, October 8th, in Greenville, South Carolina, no writers asked my mother her name. Nobody chose to write down our address. My mama was not supposed to make it, and I was not supposed to make it. You see, I was born of a teen-age mother, who was born of a teen-age mother. I understand. I know abandonment, and people being mean to you, and saying you're nothing and nobody and can never be anything. (1988)

Closing his address, Jackson used another call and response formula to summarize his message.

The participatory chant used was “Keep hope alive.” From the standpoint of orality, the Afrocentric element of nommo signifies the generative power of the spoken word (Cummings and Roy 63). Call and response are indicators of the power Nommo has to enhance the audiences' enthusiasm and connectedness to a message.

Conclusion

Applying the Afrocentric method to the rhetorical practices of black Americans provides an embrace of aspects of the cultures heritage that is often overlooked. The Afrocentric approach examines the interplay amongst the elements of culture-centered discourse. Although focusing on the elements of African culture that influence the experience and discourse of black Americans, Afrocentricity is an inclusionary concept concerned with the human experience. Jackson's ability to present an Afrocentric message that transcends race and ethnic heritage and embrace diverse communities speaks to the worldly nature of this type of discourse. As discourse that promotes connectedness, Afrocentric discourse is not only concerned with unifying

audiences through various aspects of delivery, but also celebrate its heritage while acknowledging other cultures, and resisting suppression of its values. Jackson's DNC rhetoric is an excellent representation of how Afrocentric discourse transcends the differences among groups in a multicultural society. Functioning under the tenets of Afrocentricity Jackson's discourse proves to be truly unifying.

The political landscape and contours of political rhetoric in America is somewhat stagnant when attempting to introduce counter-cultural concepts into mainstream American society. However, in keeping with the tradition of political campaign rhetoric, Jackson's use of Afrocentric rhetoric suggested loyalty and admiration for his cultural rhetorical heritage. Perhaps Jackson, who has become known for his oratorical prowess, relied upon Afrocentric rhetoric due to its unifying nature. In a society as diverse as the United States, minority populations and their contributions to culture may often be tossed aside. However, with Jackson's use of Afrocentric elements, he presented the American public with the dynamic nature of black rhetorical practices.

The Afrocentric methodology attempts to permeate far beyond the surface of discourse to examine analytically the interrelatedness among rhetorical components. In addition, the Afrocentric method places emphasis on examining the black experience in accordance to traditional African culture. The rhetorical presence of Jackson at the DNC is examples of how Afrocentric elements can transcend cultural barriers, thoughtfully embracing all communities.

CHAPTER 5

I AM SOMEBODY: PERFORMING BLACK MASCULINITY ON THE POLITICAL STAGE

The media's influence upon existing definitions and representations of masculinity has a significant impact upon the perception of what is masculine and who fits this role. One depiction of masculinity that has been greatly affected by what is presented in the media is black masculinity. Representations of black masculinity in the United States are historically controlled by and in contradiction to dominant discourses of masculinity and race. It is often presented as counter-cultural and is often scripted as a victim of the notion of "othering."

Although bound by discriminatory laws and practices, blacks have traditionally resisted and rejected this "othering" and marginalization. Author Seth Kreisberg posited, Genovese (1974) explains that enslaved Africans developed a culture of resistance to the institution of slavery and demonstrated their opposition through their language and communication patterns, their work rhythms, and their frequent running away from their burden of slavery (*Transforming Power... 17*). In addition, to the previously mentioned cultural institutions that have oppressed black men, specifically, many have evolved and have largely gone unchanged, while new institutions have emerged like, job markets and access to education. These systematic acts of oppression and segregation have remained constant and influenced how black men perform their masculine identity.

This chapter examines how Jackson's performance of a black masculine identity (as a representative example) constructs and constrains the communication styles and patterns of black male politicians, who have given an address to the dominant public at the DNC. In addition to this examination, this chapter also seeks to determine if Jackson provided the inventional

framework for DNC addresses given by other black male orators, specifically Rev. Al Sharpton and President Barack Obama.

As noted in Chapter Two, performance scholar Judith Butler asserts “the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts” (“Performative Acts” 272). Therefore, gender and its’ characteristics become something one can perform. According to James Messerschmidt, the structured action theory shows that “we are male or female by means of concocted behaviors that may be interpreted accordingly” (7). In fact, the assumed biological response for men to act masculine does not exist naturally. Its existence is based on the social constructions of what is perceived to be masculine and feminine. As beings, humans do not perform a preexisting gender identity; rather, identity is created through performance. Essentially, a masculine performance can only succeed because it “echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices” (“Performative Acts” 272). An implication of Butler’s performativity theory is that identity performances are based on observations and learned behaviors; however, one’s sense of self identification does influence gender performance.

Along with the prescribed performances based upon one’s perceived gender, race and other intersections of one’s identity influence how her/his performance is perceived. The performances often associated with black masculinity are “figured in the popular imagination as the basis of masculine hero worship in the case of rappers; as naturalized and commodified bodies in the case of athletes; as symbols of menace and threat in the case of black gang members; and as noble warriors in the case of Afrocentric nationalists and Fruit of Islam” (Gause 22). The performance of one’s identity is constrained by the audience’s familiarity with

particular performances and influenced by the incentives or impediments attached to a specific cultural context.

For there to be an acceptance of the social construction of gender and the performance of it by oppressed groups, there must be a narrative in existence that constructs these identities. Thus, black males and other minority populations are not the controlling agents of their identity. As with all identity depictions, black masculine identity has solidified and accepted into one's cultural ideology due to stereotypes and other characteristics associated with this identity over the course of time. The stereotypical depictions of black masculinities have served to hinder the growth of black males and present a unique challenge of overcoming these representations.

A Brief Trajectory of Black Masculinity

The cultural development of the gender identity of black males is one filled with the burdens of discriminatory practices and a lack of agency. To understand the complex roots of the black male in America, one must start with his introduction to the "new world." When the first slaves arrived in the early seventeenth century, they were sold as indentured servants, and as such, were able to obtain their freedom after working out their indenture. However, by the middle of the century, most Africans who arrived in the colonies had no indenture and were relegated to a life of enslavement, which would continue for generations to come. Upon the abolishment and ultimate end of slavery in the mid and late nineteenth century, blacks had to forge an existence for themselves. In the end, this new-found freedom, during the Reconstruction period, was not without difficulty for an entire race of people. Especially difficult was the transition from slave hood to personhood for the black man.

Reconstruction, the period after the U.S. Civil War where the citizens of the nation worked to rebuild the U.S., was a time of potential racial harmony. However, the struggle to

secure this access to freedom was stifled by a lack of citizenship and oppressive policies and laws, especially in the South. Being granted citizenship by the fourteenth amendment, blacks now faced a new reality. This reality was to find a place in society. After the period of reconstruction and gaining citizenship, blacks still encountered discrimination. These periods were particularly difficult for black males transitioning from enslavement into freedom.

Throughout American history, black males have found it difficult to fulfill the roles of traditional hegemonic masculinity. This form of masculinity refers to “a particular variety of masculinity to which others [...] are subordinated” (“Toward A New Sociology of Masculinity...” 587) and also, “how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate dominance” (“Toward A New Sociology of Masculinity” 592). Not only did the lack of a role model make it difficult for black men to fulfill the roles of masculinity, but also the oppressive society in which they lived. These men were not expected to and often discouraged to exercise the rights granted to them with citizenship at the political and social level. This treatment as second-class citizens was often resulted violent conflicts, lynchings, and unlawful raids of black owned properties. Black people of every period have been aware of the limitations and restrictions that impede upon their advancement. These observable injustices helped to inform gender roles that emerged within black communities.

The continued development of white masculine values has been historically linked to the underdevelopment of those of minority populations. Hegemonic masculinity is a white concept; thus, minorities only strive toward, but never are able to achieve this standard. As stated in Chapter Two, hegemonic masculinity is characterized by physical force, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, and heterosexuality. Slavery, reconstruction, Jim Crow, and

other forms of exploitation all are implicated in this constant struggle for achieving the traditional notion of masculinity. The construction of masculine identities is not a stagnant concept; rather, it is in constant fluctuation and continues to evolve. While there are some parallels between the social construction of white masculinity and that of blacks, the characteristics of each are noticeably distinct. In particular, the historical and lived experience of the black male has left a significant imprint on their concept of the masculine, attitudes, and behavior.

Contemporary Constructions of Black Masculinity

In his book, *Geographies of Exclusion*, David Sibley explained how black and white color associations influenced how European colonialists regulated the inhabitants of their colonized lands based on the complexion of their skin. Thus, whiteness became associated with Europeans and positive meanings such as superiority and cleanliness, whereas black became associated with the colonized individuals, usually of a darker complexion, and negative meanings such as unintelligent, dirty, and inferiority (1995). With standing the test of time, these associations have permeated nearly every aspect of American culture. This is especially true with the media and its representation of blacks. Negative representations of blacks were popularized with the help of the film, *Birth of a Nation*. As cultural theorist Manthia Diawara (1993) explained:

The Birth of a Nation constitutes the grammar book for Hollywood's representations of Black manhood and womanhood, its obsession with miscegenation, and its fixing of Black people within certain spaces, such as kitchens, and into certain supporting roles, such as criminals, on the screen. White people must occupy the center, leaving Black people with only one choice—to exist in relation to Whiteness. (3)

These representations of blacks during the Reconstruction have had a lasting impact on the portrayal of blacks and black masculine performance in popular culture. In *We Real Cool*, hooks argued, the vastly perpetuated stereotypical images of black men have an immense influence on the formation of a young black male's identity. In a later work, she goes on to explain how patriarchal cultures further restrict black masculine identity saying:

Black men have had no dramatic say when it comes to the way they are represented. [. . .] As a consequence they are victimized by stereotypes that were first articulated in the nineteenth century but hold sway over the minds and imaginations of citizens of this nation in the present day. Black males who refuse categorization are rare, for the price of visibility in the contemporary world of white supremacy is that black male identity be defined in relation to the stereotype whether by embodying it or seeking to be other than it. (*We Real Cool* xii)

The historical and social constructions of race in the United States have influenced the identities and performances associated with black masculinity. However, as time and American culture change, the struggles of representing black masculine identities continues to be an issue, especially in spaces with little minority representation or black influence. This chapter revisits Boyd's three representations of black masculinity in Chapter 1, the race man, the new black aesthetic, and the nigga to situate Jackson's performance of black masculine identity at the DNC. It is critical to note, these representations of black masculinity only serve to limit the scope of the innumerable identity performances of black masculinity and not suggest these are the only representations in existence.

According to Boyd (1997), each representation of black masculinity symbolizes different expressions, meanings, and ideologies of the identity. The first representation is the race man, who exemplifies cultural advancement by promoting images of the race that are acceptable not only to his own community, but also acceptable to members of the dominant society. In his book,

Am I Black Enough for You?, Boyd explains, “During the earlier part of the twentieth century and through the civil rights movement, the phrase “race man” was used in the black community to refer to men who, through their efforts, exemplified excellence” (18). The race man is encapsulated in the character of Bill Cosby circa the 1980s, which provided an ideal image of black masculinity in his role as Heathcliff Huxtable on *The Cosby Show*. The integrationist rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the establishment of a black middle and upper class drive this idea of advancing the race through cultural achievement. According to Charles Henry the fastest way to gain this achievement is, “to act as models of proper behavior for the black masses” (37). The individuals embodying this representation sought to provide an image of the black man that would positively reflect the culture and community. These men ranged from entertainers to public figures such as ministers and elected officials.

The second representation is the new black aesthetics which is the black masculine identity based upon the politics of Black Nationalists such as Louis Farrakhan and Malcolm X. Boyd suggests the individual who represents the new black aesthetics, is in search of power and wishes to enter the dominant culture by wielding this newfound power. Although those representatives of the new black aesthetic would like to gain admission to the dominant culture, their goal is to achieve this status without sacrificing or contradicting their black heritage. While one of the main purposes for the race man was to ensure blacks as a collective advanced, the new black aesthetics was concerned more with individual success. Boyd has assigned Spike Lee as the representative figure of the new black aesthetic.

The last representation of black masculinity is the nigga. According to Boyd, the nigga is not concerned with politics and fails to have a distinguishable leader and path. However, the most pressing concern of the nigga is illustrating the lifestyle he leads. He explains:

The modern-day “nigga,” having come to prominence through several cultural arenas including rap music, African American cinema, and professional sports, equally defies aspects of mainstream white culture, as well as the at times restrictive dimensions of status quo Black culture. (*Am I Black Enough* 31)

Due to the overwhelmingly disproportionate exposure of the nigga in contemporary society, as opposed to the race man and the new black aesthetic, the discussion of black masculinity has been defined by class politics with race being almost an afterthought. Once the problems of disadvantage minorities were attributed to race first, now with the upward mobility of many minority groups, socioeconomic status seems to be the greatest attribute. Boyd argued that the transitions of black masculine identities: the race man to the new black aesthetics to the nigga is directly linked to the class politics that are distinctive among each group (*Am I Black Enough* 32). In the following section, Jackson’s performance of these black masculine identities is examined in an effort to determine if he fits a particular mold of this identity or does he simultaneously embody multiple black masculine identities.

Performing a Black Masculine Discourse at the DNC

Having established Jackson’s DNC rhetoric as Afrocentric, I now examine how particular elements of Jackson’s identity performance may have influenced his rhetoric. Possibly the most scrutinized moments of his life, Jackson’s DNC appearances came with monumental pressure to not only present a convincing argument in support of the Democratic Party’s presidential agenda, but also the burden of representing a historically oppressed and stereotyped race of people especially, the men. Jackson’s performances at the DNC presented chances for him to depict the black male in a light many had rarely seen before. The way black men attempt to negotiate and perform their masculine identities in the face of immediate scrutiny due to preconceived stereotypes echoes the greater issues of the constant oppressive cultural site of struggle black

men navigate within American culture. This cultural clash often occurs within one's understanding of identity. According to hooks, in an effort to survive in America blacks have historically created identities that either radically oppose stereotypes or reinforce them (*We Real Cool*). Jackson's rhetorical performance at the DNC served to reject these stereotypes, while embracing some previously held notions.

One method of rejecting oppressive stereotypes was Jackson's embodiment of the race man. This particular performance of black masculinity works to advance the cultural heritage of Jackson. By recalling the stories of his past and providing an illustration of a little black boy from the slums, who made it to the world's biggest political stage, Jackson's rhetoric promotes cultural advancement and the uplifting of the race. He tells the story from the campaign trail to support this claim, "I see you with the big people. You don't understand my situation [...] You see me on TV, but you don't know the me that makes me, me. They see me running for the White House. They don't see the house I'm running from" (Jackson 1988). As a prescriptive of the race man, pride in one's cultural heritage is essential and as a member of that heritage one should always display the positive aspects of the community. He relies on prominent figures of the civil rights movement to put forth a positive representation of the race as a whole. He states:

If an issue is morally right, it will eventually be political. It may be political and never be right. Fannie Lou Hamer didn't have the most votes in Atlantic City, but her principles have outlasted every delegate who voted to lock her out. Rosa Parks did not have the most votes, but she was morally right. Dr. King didn't have the most votes about the Vietnam War, but he was morally right.

His reliance on these figures helps to establish an image of blacks that depicts the moral goodness within the race. They also serve as examples of people who demanded justice and equality for all. By presenting the black race in a positive manner, highlighting its member's contribution to society, Jackson begins to embody the role of the race man.

As one of the characteristics outlined by Boyd, the race man “embraces the assimilationist politics of Martin Luther King, Jr. and sees integration and a normalized black upper class as representative of a politics of advancement (*Am I Black Enough* 17). Jackson provides a positive representation of an individual, who has achieved a higher level of success who is also concerned with the advancement of his fellow man. His rhetoric also provides evidence of his embodiment of the race man by referencing other black men, who fits the mold of the race man. Particularly, he references Julian Bond’s dismissal from the state legislature. He states, “Julian Bond was denied a seat in the State Legislature because of his conscientious objection to the Vietnam War.”⁶ His reference to Bond helps to establish him as a race man, for it not only presents a positive depiction of the black man, but also depicts someone who was concerned with the welfare of others. Throughout Jackson’s DNC discourse, he advocates for inclusion and equal access to the American dream for blacks and other minority groups.

Jackson fulfilled the role of the race man, while seamlessly weaving this particular type of black masculine performance into his inclusionary speeches. He advocated for issues pertinent to black communities, but packaged them in messages of inclusion. One issue Jackson presented in this manner is the lack of enforcing specific parts of the Voting Rights Act saying, “If you want a change in this nation, you enforce that Voting Rights Act. We’ll get 12 to 20 Black, Hispanics, female and progressive congresspersons from the South” (1984). Since he was a teenager, Jackson’s life has been dedicated to the service of others. His work during the civil rights movement helped to catapult him to the ultimate human rights activist he is today. The political and social impact of Jackson’s rhetoric at the DNC is one that is similar to that of the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. Following the example of his mentor, Jackson tackled issues

⁶ 1988. Although this is true, it is imperative to note that with intervention from the courts, Bond was allowed and did serve in the Georgia State Legislature.

of race and injustice by situating the black and minority issues as greater American issues. Twenty years after King's discourse of advocating for racial justice, the issues of race and injustice were still in need of discussion and in Jackson's rhetoric presented to the dominant culture it once again became transcendent of race, appealing to the humanistic causes.

Just as the race man, Jackson also embodies the black masculine performative identity of the new black aesthetic. As addressed earlier, this particular representation or performance of black masculine identity is characterized and influenced by Black Nationalist political rhetoric. According to Boyd, those who embody this depiction of black masculine identity were products of the post-civil rights era. They are more than likely the children and grandchildren of the race man. Boyd states, "This new wave is loosely composed of blacks who came of age after the civil rights and Black Power movements" (24). The struggle to gain access to the dominant culture had already been fought and won in some instances. Novelist Trey Ellis used the phrase "New Black Aesthetic" to identify the blacks, who were given more access to opportunity because of the work of those who embodies the ideology of the race man during the previous generation. He suggests this group inherits its ideologies from "a few Seventies pioneers that shamelessly borrows and reassembles across race and class lines" (20). The ultimate goal of this power-seeking group was to access and control their own identity and destiny. Although Jackson was not born post-civil rights and followed the leadership and ideologies put forth by Malcolm X's more conservative counterpart, he exhibited traits found among those members of the new black aesthetic. In true Jackson fashion, he employs a metaphoric narrative to champion the idea of people gaining control of their existence. In this narrative about fighting for control, he states, "should my frail craft prove too slight for waves that sweep those billows o'er, I'd rather go down in the stirring fight than drowse to death at the sheltered shore" (1988). Jackson's own

existence is another example of the new black aesthetic; he moved up the class hierarchy as well as became a major social activist. His own candidacy for the U.S. Presidency is about gaining control and blurring the class lines. Stating, “subclass, underclass; when you see Jesse Jackson, when my name goes in nomination, your name goes in nomination,” (1984) was an attempt to assure the erasure of class importance in politics.

Jackson’s representation of the new black aesthetic is as powerful as his embodiment of the race man. His rhetoric at the DNC is not solely about the advancing of the race culture, but it clearly emphasizes a need to end class warfare and establish minority groups on equal socioeconomic footing. While the aesthetics of Jackson and Cosby are one’s of a solidly middle and upper class of blacks, Jackson’s performance of the new black aesthetic and its ideologies serves to make the notion of blacks existing in American upper classes less of a rarity. Boyd asserts, members of the new black aesthetic were born into an upwardly mobile society and new institutions and jobs were becoming more readily available to them, than previous generations (25). This new upwardly mobile society would therefore, easily navigate in white society. Again, not of this new generation, Jackson negotiates and navigates between the upper echelons of black and white society. Evidence of this is the moment he recalls sharing with Hubert Humphrey during his 1984 address. He states, “I went to see Hubert Humphrey three days before he died. He had just called Richard Nixon from his dying bed, and many people wondered why” (Jackson 1984). This exchange between Jackson and a dying Humphrey illustrates the power and influence Jackson had amassed, by him visiting a prominent American figure on his death bed. Jackson’s rhetoric also encompasses another belief held by the new black aesthetic. It is not as overt as the topic of class, but the issue racial equality is hugely important. Through constant

referral of phrases like the “rainbow coalition” and “common ground” he adopts the sentiment of the new black aesthetic by equalizing the races.

Jackson’s ultimate performance of the new black aesthetic is his ability to infiltrate the mainstream, without threatening or compromising his cultural identity. This compromising of identity would be easy to accomplish due to his infiltration of mainstream politics, where it is easy to turn a blind eye to the issues of the group you once belonged to. However, this was not the case with Jackson. In the 1984 address, he discusses his successes and failures in his efforts to lead the party. Saying, “I’ve tried to offer leadership to the Democratic Party and the nation” (Jackson). He goes on to list some of the possible successes of his campaign, in an effort to appeal to mainstream sensibilities. He states, “If, in my high moments, I have done some good [...] or in any way along the way helped somebody, then this campaign has not been in vain” (1984). Although he was now a fixture in mainstream politics, his rhetoric and the issues he championed were still those of people with similar experiences of marginalization and disenfranchisement, who ultimately helped to establish him as a political force. He presented an identity that was both of the black and mainstream bourgeois. Serving as an example of the new black aesthetic, Jackson’s maintenance of his cultural identity revealed the existence and political threat of the black middle class.

The final representative performance of a black masculine identity is that of the nigga. According to historian Robin Kelly, “the nigga is a product of the ghetto [...] whose identity is linked to the hood instead of simply their skin color” (*Kickin’ Reality* 210). Typically, one would assume this identity would be racially motivated due to the historical context surrounding the word and the treatment of blacks; however, Boyd states, “the ultimate defining characteristic of the modern day nigga is class” (31). However, due to the interests, skills, and jobs it is difficult

to relegate those in this group to a specific class standing. Unlike the previous two identity performances, the nigga is not concerned with infiltrating the mainstream. Rather, he thrives on living along the margins of society. He does, however, participate and interact in the mainstream. In opposition to the race man and the new black aesthetic, the nigga is not interested in traditional educational attainment. He is often educated in the ways of the street (33). Explaining the class status of this group, William Julius Wilson paints a depressing impoverished existence by stating: They “lack training and skills and either experience long-term unemployment or are not members of the labor force, individuals who engage in street crime and other forms of aberrant behavior, and families that experience long-term spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency” (*The Truly Disadvantaged* 8). However this broad assertion about the nigga appears to be flawed when examining millionaire athletes and entertainers, who self-identify as a nigga.

On the surface, one would not associate this identity with Jackson. However, his rhetoric at the 1988 DNC may say otherwise. This assigning of a nigga-like identity performance to Jackson in 1988 may seem far-fetched. However, during his speech he recalls growing up in the slums and experiencing poverty. Recall the defining characteristic of the nigga is class. Vividly describing his childhood, Jackson states, he was “born in a three-room house, bathroom in the backyard, slop jar by the bed, no hot and cold running water [...] Wallpaper used for decoration? No. For a windbreaker” (1988). During his appearances at the DNC, Jackson may have far been removed from the ghetto or slums, but the intersections of his past identity worked to inform the discourse of his present. Further validated his nigga identity, Jackson goes on to recount the sacrifices of his mother. He says, “My mother [...] went to work early, with runs in her stockings [...] so that my brother and I could have matching socks” (1988). The class dynamics of the

nigga distinctly separates his identity from those of the race man and new black aesthetic and eventually informs the trajectory of one's life.

From examples present in Jackson's DNC rhetoric and the characteristics of Boyd's three representative black masculine identities, it is clear Jackson simultaneously performs the role of the race man, the new black aesthetic, and the nigga. The interpretation of black masculinity serves as a site of cultural struggle for members of the race as well as those outside of it. In order to overcome this struggle, blacks and other Americans must deconstruct these performances of masculinity. Jackson's performances at the DNC signaled a new era of rhetorical performances, by providing the initial introduction of black male rhetors.

Jackson: A Continual Source of Inspiration

From his illustrious career as a civil rights leader to his awe-inspiring presidential campaigns, Jackson has been an inspiration for countless men and women of color, including myself. However, this inspiration does not only stem from his work to right the wrongs of an unjust society or his boisterous oratorical skills, it is much deeper. Jackson's historic bids for the U.S. Presidency and DNC discourse provided the nation with another side of the black man many had never seen previously. Although his campaign for President was unsuccessful, the speeches he gave at the DNC during each respective campaign cycle served to influence and inform the rhetoric of many black male politicians, who were slated to address the DNC.

As this particular section of this chapter was not a major element of this thesis, a brief textual analysis of Jackson's 1988 address, Rev. Al Sharpton's 2004 address, as well as President Barack Obama's 2004 address were performed to call attention to the structural similarities, of which I argue, were critical in the resounding success of Jackson's rhetoric. Therefore, Jackson's discourse provided the perfect format in which to present an oratorical performance of the black

masculine identity in the American political sphere. Having already established how Jackson performed three masculine identities simultaneously, it is the goal of this section to show how his rhetoric has had a lasting impact upon black masculine DNC rhetoric.

In his introduction to the DNC, Jackson began by calling for unity within the Democratic Party and acknowledging the struggles of those who came before him. Specifically, he acknowledges leaders of the civil rights movements. He then proceeds to invite Rosa Parks on stage as he announces her presence. “Ladies and gentlemen, Mrs. Rosa Parks -- the mother of the civil rights movement” (Jackson 1988). This is then followed by a brief history of race relations at the DNC when he discusses Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and calls attention to the fact that Martin Luther King, Jr. was buried in the host city. He says, “Twenty-four years ago, the late Fannie Lou Hamer and Aaron Henry [...] were locked out onto the streets in Atlantic City” (1988). By calling for unity and recognizing individuals, who fought for equality for everyone, Jackson attempted to bridge racial and social barriers amongst a diversified populous. He attempts to establish this unity by saying, “Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. lies only a few miles from us tonight. We sit here together, a rainbow, a coalition--the sons and daughters of slave masters and the sons and daughters of slaves” (1988).

Following his lead in 2004, Sharpton appeals to his audience in an extraordinarily similar fashion. Sharpton employs the exact methods as Jackson did to appeal to the vastly diverse crowd present for his address. He also harkens back to the leaders of the civil rights movement saying, “Forty years ago, in 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party stood at the Democratic convention in Atlantic City fighting to preserve voting rights for all America and all Democrats, regardless of race or gender. Hamer’s stand inspired Dr. King’s march in Selma, which brought about the Voting Rights Act of 1965” (Sharpton 2004). He also

acknowledges Jackson's first DNC appearance in a similar manner as Jackson's of Hamer's. He exclaims, "Twenty years ago, Reverend Jesse Jackson stood at the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, again, appealing to the preserve those freedoms" (2004). The success of these methods relies on the logical appeal of the audience's recollection acknowledgement of the racial progress within the party as well as the nation.

Both Jackson (1988) and Sharpton then carry on to advocate for the party's presidential ticket by offering compliments for a well fought primary race. The admiration for the ticket continues with the stories from the campaign trail and how the opponents are similar to themselves as well as the rest of the American public. Each then begins sections acknowledging various oppressed groups and offering solutions to the problems they suffered under previous administrations. Jackson does this by using a patchwork quilt narrative. This narrative is in an effort to symbolize the multicultural nature of oppression in America. Once all the patches of the quilt have been pieced together, it symbolically represents the diversity of the nation as a collective whole. Jackson's narrative unfolded as follows:

Farmers, you seek fair prices and you are right, but you cannot stand alone. Your patch is not big enough. Workers, you fight for fair wages, you are right, but your patch labor is not big enough. Women, you seek comparable worth and pay equity, you are right, but your patch is not big enough. (1988)

By ultimately telling employing narratives illustrating the party's need for unity, Jackson's stories told his audiences what fight against. The party was not to only challenge the Republicans, but also challenge the oppressive practices of American society.

Much like Jackson's patchwork quilt narrative, Sharpton employed a narrative that highlights the challenges facing Americans in 2004. However, Sharpton did not use a fanciful metaphoric narrative to appeal to his audience. His narrative was grounded in the promise of

America. Tackling the issues of the day, Sharpton also offered solutions to the problems plaguing Americans. His narrative states:

The promise of America guarantees health care for all of its citizens and doesn't force seniors to travel to Canada to buy prescription drugs they can't afford here at home. The promise of America provides that those who work in our health care system can afford to be hospitalized in the very beds they clean up every day. (2004)

It serves the same purpose as Jackson's narrative, which is to provide opposition to the aforementioned challenges and bring attention to the errors of the previous Republican administration.

In closing their speeches, both men provide a personal narrative to summarize the promise of the American democracy. They both tell stories of their extremely similar upbringings. Beginning with mothers, who worked as domestics and fathers, who were absent. However, through their struggles it was the values they obtained as children that determined the person they grew to become. Another shared element of their closing is the chants and mantras. In 1988, Jackson's famous "Keep hope alive!" concluded his address in an effort to inspire the audience to strive for a brighter future. Sharpton's 2004 address concluded with "let's make America beautiful again." This phrase asserts due to the previous administration America had somehow lost its luster and beauty. However, it signaled that a Democratic administration could restore America to her former glory.

The similarities between these two pieces of discourse substantiate the argument of Jackson providing the framework for black male rhetors at the DNC. Or in the least, Jackson and Sharpton, who are close friends, employed the same speechwriter. In addition to comparing Sharpton's rhetoric to Jackson's, to further validate the claim of Jackson providing the

inventional framework for black male rhetors at the DNC, President Obama's 2004 address is analyzed.

As with Sharpton's rhetoric, Obama's rhetoric displays some immediate similarities to that of Jackson's. The first is the telling of his parent's experience in America. Because Jackson's father was not as present in his life, he was not mentioned in the speech. However, the story of Obama's father is critical to ensuring the narrative of the diversity and multicultural nature of America works. In the same manner Jackson told his story of overcoming obstacles, Obama told his father's. He states:

My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. [...] Through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place, America that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before. (2004)

His father's story serves as a message to inspire and promote the promise of America. He continues with how his parents met and began an interracial relationship, when the practice was still illegal in some states. As Jackson, the most influential people in his life during childhood were his grandparents and he addressed his admiration for them. He also acknowledged those who made it possible for him to address the DNC; unlike Jackson he did not name them individually. He also calls for unity among the American citizenry saying, "It is that fundamental belief: I am my brother's keeper. I am my sister's keeper that makes this country work. It's what allows us to pursue our individual dreams and yet still come together as one American family" (2004). The expression is often used with the submission that those of the Christian faith have a responsibility to their fellow man. This obligation of taking care of each other speaks to essence of a unified family at the heart of the human condition.

The final aspect shared element of Jackson's and Obama's rhetoric is the theme of hope. Throughout both addresses, the theme of hope serves to uplift and inspire the audience to look to the future. In his 1988 address, Jackson provides the audience with evidence of the power of hope when he discussed the election of President John F. Kennedy. Asserting with a spirit of unity, the impossible becomes possible if only by a slight margin. He states, "He won by the margin of our hope [...] therefore, we won by the margin of our hope, inspired by courageous leadership" (1988). Later, he uses hope to encourage his audience to keeping dreaming of prosperity. He says, "Use hope and imagination as weapons of survival and progress" (Jackson). As Jackson's, Obama's theme of hope advocates for unity by offering a rhetoric transcendent of race, class, and politics. He says, "Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope" (2004). This brief moment within his address become the overarching theme for the entire speech. He contends that hope is the foundational principle for the U.S. saying, it "is God's greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation. A belief in things not seen. A belief that there are better days ahead" (2004).

Unlike the overt similarities present amongst Jackson's and Sharpton's rhetoric, the similarities between Jackson's and Obama's are more prominent in theme and topics, rather than overall structure. In concluding, Jackson's rhetoric continues to permeate the discourse of contemporary politicians. For, it has proved successful in capturing audiences and rallying them to support the party's platform.

The Importance of Jackson's Influence on DNC Rhetoric

Being the first black male to have such a prominent presence at the DNC, Jackson illustrated what is possible of individuals from marginalized groups. His tremendous success of unifying a diverse audience on the basis of commonality provided an inventional framework for

future rhetors of color to follow. The comparison of the addresses given by Jackson, Sharpton, and Obama serves to show the impact Jackson had on the rhetorical presentations of black men, when addressing the DNC.

Jackson's rhetorical performance at the 1984 and 1988 conventions was uniquely important. Being placed on the national political stage, while never having held any political office, Jackson's rhetoric united people from extremely diverse backgrounds and established him as a formidable political challenger. The inclusivity of the rhetoric offered moments of substance everyone could relate to. Having worked extraordinarily well for Jackson, rhetors like Sharpton and Obama were able to assert their black masculine identity by employing the same techniques as Jackson without fear of rejection.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of three black masculine performative identities, the race man, the new black aesthetic, and the nigga this chapter has offered evidence of Jackson performative identity at the DNC. Although presented with innumerable performances of black masculine identities, society is still fascinated with the black male and image he performs. The politicization of black men's place and space impedes upon their enacting their true identity, for dependent upon one's place and space, the black male's identity performance is constructed and constrained. By linking textual representations and Jackson's performance at the DNC, I have explored how each representative identity influenced his performance. As well as how identity is in constant fluctuation even with the rhetorical choices one makes.

In regard to Jackson's performance and rhetoric being a framework for other black masculine rhetor's at the DNC, the analysis of Sharpton's and Obama's speeches established this to be true. This chapter does not seek to assert Jackson's DNC rhetoric as the only successful

formula. Rather, it serves to applaud Jackson on the proven success of his rhetorical performance and illustrates how his oratorical prowess continues to influence black male political speech.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

During his quest for political prominence and power, Jesse Jackson's oratorical prowess helped to move him from the margins of the American political sphere to the mainstream. Both, his charismatic persona and talent for unifying diverse groups of people aided in his ambitious political pursuits. Never forgetting the struggle of those on the margins, his messages remained profoundly connected to the issues of black and minority communities with heavy reliance on the civil rights era. Although Jackson's campaigns for president were not successful, they did offer the American public an electable black candidate who could not only win the election, but also win by securing votes from a highly diverse set of the population. The rhetoric Jackson espoused at the DNC worked to further unity among the various identity groups. With the campaign and election of President Barack Obama in 2008, as well as his re-election in 2012, Jackson observed how Obama employed a similar rhetoric to unite the American constituency he championed for decades.

Throughout this study, I have argued that Jackson's rhetoric functions to unite diverse audiences by employing characteristics of Afrocentric rhetoric, while also influencing his simultaneous performance of three black masculine identities, the race man, the new black aesthetic, and the nigga. While this study has identified ways in which Jackson's rhetoric influenced his DNC discourse, it has also served to illustrate how his identity of performance of the three representative black masculinities influence his rhetoric, asserting that cyclical nature of identity and rhetoric. Jackson's prominence at the DNC in the 1980s makes an examination of his rhetorical performances worthy of analysis. This chapter continues, first, with a review of the study's arguments and findings within each chapter. This review is followed by a reprise of the

research questions to offer implications for Jackson's use Afrocentric rhetoric and his particular performance of black masculinity. Finally, I provide the limitations of this study and direction for future research.

Findings of the Study

The purpose of this study has been to engage the DNC rhetoric of Jackson to explore how Afrocentricity serves to unify diverse audiences while using culture-centered discourse, how the characteristics of this rhetoric inform the future of DNC rhetoric given by black male rhetors, and the discourse intersection of race and gender in the dominant American political sphere. Throughout this study, I employed the theoretical frameworks of Afrocentricity, black masculinity, and intersectionality to situate Jackson's genre specific rhetoric. To conclude, I briefly summarize the findings of each chapter. Then, offer some critical implications of this study.

Initially, Chapter Two proposed that Jackson's rhetorical performance and his identity must be seen through an intersecting methodological lens to discover how the intersections of his identities influence each other. By using multiple lenses, it becomes easier to discern how Jackson's rhetoric is impacted by the culture-centered paradigm of Afrocentricity and performance of his black masculine identity. Addressing the dominant American public, on one of the biggest political stages, Jackson would have to negotiate employing culturally specific communication patterns and practices and overcome preconceived stereotypes about the black male. Thus, I used Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, combining it with Asante's scholarship on Afrocentricity, and Boyd's representative performances of black masculinity.

Chapter Three assessed Jackson's performance of black masculinity at the DNC by exploring the context of his development as a civil rights leader and political figure. Jackson's

masculine identity was influenced by his rearing as a black male in the segregated South. Much of his activism and speaking during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement informed the issues he championed as well as his oratorical style, throughout his career. Jackson and his rhetoric offer the opportunity to explore how championing culturally specific political issues functions to construct and constrain one's integration into mainstream politics. Jackson's integration into the political mainstream offers insight into the potentials of his intersectionality, which functions to explain how his racial and gender identities influence his presence at the DNC.

Chapter Four provided evidence of the Afrocentric qualities of Jackson's DNC discourse. In his addresses during the 1984 and 1988 conventions, Jackson's use of culture-centered rhetoric like Afrocentricity worked to unite his audiences. Within his use of Afrocentricity, Jackson relied upon themes of hope, social justice, collective memory, and his lived experiences as a man of color and minority status to advocate for change. By appealing to shared values and ideologies of those within the Democratic Party, Jackson's rhetoric became transcendent of race, class, and gender, allowing him to build a diverse coalition.

Chapter Five critiqued Jackson's performance of black masculine identity within his DNC discourse. During the research process, I discovered, as in Chapter Four, that most studies of Jackson's DNC discourse focused on the rhetorical strategies and tactics used in the addresses. However, taking the study of Jackson's DNC rhetoric further, I analyzed how he enacts particular representative performances of black masculinity within his discourse using the three depictions of black masculine identity addressed in Todd Boyd's *Am I Black Enough For You?*. These representations of black masculinity are the race man, who is signified by his cultural and economic advancement of the race by depicting a positive image, the new black aesthetic, which is characterized by his concern of individual success while maintaining his cultural heritage, and

the final representation is the nigga, who is the antithesis of the previous two. The nigga embodies the ways of the streets and could care less about depicting a positive image of the race and has no motivation for establishing himself within dominant culture. Finally, through a reading of Jackson's DNC rhetoric, I argued that he simultaneously embodied the representations of black masculine identity as posited by Boyd, fluidly. This chapter also called attention to the legacy of Jackson rhetorical performance at the DNC by highlighting the similarities that exists among Jackson's rhetoric and that of black men to follow such as Reverend Al Sharpton and President Barack Obama. Therefore, I also argued that Jackson's discourse at the DNC, during the 1980s, provided an inventional framework for men of color to follow when addressing the diverse audiences of the DNC.

This study offered a rhetorical analysis of Jackson's DNC discourse in response to questions concerning the rhetorical strategies employed by Jackson to capture a diverse audience, as well as the implications of using a culture-centered communication paradigm when addressing an immensely diverse audience, while acknowledging one's minority status. As a result, I contend that Jackson's DNC rhetoric and identity performance offers rhetorical studies discipline implications concerning Afrocentricity and black masculine identity. I begin by situating Afrocentricity as a paradigm inclusive of all cultures before concluding with Jackson's performance of black masculinity as a space for constant negotiation.

Afrocentricity

Analysis of Jackson's discourse implies that by employing an Afrocentric paradigm to the discourse of black rhetors, critics are provided with a more representative interpretation of these artifacts. By specifically concerning itself with the black experience, the concept of Afrocentricity becomes the best method for accurately interpreting the meanings within black

discourse. Thus, critics must begin analyzing the discourse of minority populations concerning themselves with the cultural foundations of rhetorical practices. As a culture-centered paradigm, Afrocentricity places the Afrocentric characteristics of rhetoric at the same level as those of the white dominant culture. Analysis of Jackson's discourse reveals the importance of culturally specific scholarship. For, understanding communication practices of other cultures is increasingly important in a multicultural society. As rhetoricians and critics of culture, we must be reminded of the diverse nature of rhetoric.

Further, the increasing visible presence of black political orators has created a need to examine the notion of black political speech. The multiculturalism of the U.S. dictates an appreciation of one's heritage, while embracing others. Although this study posits Afrocentric discourse to be culturally specific, it also provided evidence of its transcendent characteristics. When delivered to a diverse audience, Afrocentric rhetoric can become more concerned with the human experience, rather than highlighting the influence of African culture. Revealing Afrocentric rhetoric has a collective and humanistic approach to communication, celebrating the diversity of the human experience. Jackson's DNC discourse of the 1980s demonstrably conforms to the principles of Afrocentricity in that it promotes unity and understanding, remains a fundamental reflection of its heritage, weighs itself against its own standards, validates and celebrates itself with and among other cultural realities, contributes to scholarship and rallies against attempts at its subjugation.

Black Masculinity

This study utilized the representations of the race man, the new black aesthetic, and the nigga to analyze Jackson's performance of black masculinity. While these identities are distinctly different, Jackson's rhetorical performance of each identity proved to provide a

glimpse into the lives of black males. By addressing the issues pertinent to each identity, Jackson's rhetoric moves seamlessly from the race man to the nigga, without ever compromising the depiction of the race. The political and culturally diverse nature of the DNC served to construct and constrain his rhetorical performance of a black masculine identity. The rhetoric he espoused was dictated by his rhetorical situation. In a space where one's cultural heritage may suffer, for fear of offending other cultural groups, Jackson's performance embraced his identity. During his rhetorical performances at the DNC, he did not attempt to position himself within Eurocentric notions of masculinity, for which he was never intended to be included in.

In an attempt to avoid advocating an essentialist perspective, I attended to Jackson's individual performance of black masculine identity. However, this study also asserted other black male rhetors at the DNC likely used Jackson's performances as a guide, although perhaps not intentionally. Employing their own performances of black masculinity, Sharpton and Obama did, however, embody similar identity representations. It is paramount that I acknowledge other forms and representations of black masculinity; however, to narrow the scope of this study, I believe it was nearly impossible to completely avoid using stereotypical depictions. This thesis emphasizes the constant struggle of the negotiation of black masculine identity that merits attention and the creation of strategies giving black men the agency over the construction of their identity. Although this thesis discussed three identity performances of black masculinity, there are infinite performances of this identity.

Genre and the DNC

The context of the rhetorical situation and genre acts to provide the direction in which rhetoric should focus. Jackson's performance at the DNC not only made the rhetorical presence of black male rhetors prominent at the nominating convention, it also provided the American

public with a viable black presidential candidate. The rhetoric Jackson espoused at the DNC influenced the method future black rhetors would use during nominating convention addresses to appeal to diverse audiences. During the course of this project, I discovered Jackson's 1988 address incorporated several elements and sentences from his 1984 address. This discovery aids in my argument of Jackson providing an inventional framework, for he, himself used his first address to direct the path of his following appearances at the DNC.

Direction for Future Research

This thesis has explored the DNC discourse and performance of a black masculine identity of Jackson, one of the most charismatic political speakers of the modern era. Despite providing evidence of the Afrocentric nature of Jackson's 1980s DNC rhetoric, to prove the importance of Afrocentricity to Jackson's rhetoric more can be done to further substantiate this claim. A potential future study could analyze his other appearances at the DNC to understand Jackson's reliance on Afrocentric rhetoric to appeal to diverse audiences. One might also explore the impact of specific Afrocentric characteristics, such as signification, on Jackson's DNC discourse. While this study examined Jackson's use of Afrocentric rhetoric within his DNC address, potentially one could conduct a study to interrogate whether the use of this culture-centered is indicative to all black rhetors at the DNC. Due to using a specific case study that was not feasible for this thesis; however, a broader study could provide information useful in studying DNC discourse given by black rhetors.

Also exploring the performance of black masculine identities, this thesis relies upon three representations of this identity. Future studies could interrogate other performances of black masculinity present within U.S. politics. Jackson's particular performance was that of a rhetorical nature, future research could actually critique his performance in the traditional form.

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