

The Audacity of Hope?

Holly Kent

Welcome to our special issue of *thirdspace*, 'The Audacity of Hope?' We are very excited to have the chance to publish the diverse, provocative, and engaging collection of articles and reviews which appear in this issue, each of which offers a new and intriguing perspective on questions of race, gender, identity, and politics. We first conceived the idea for this issue during the early days of the Obama presidency, as the American nation (and the world at large) sought to discover what the Obama campaign's soaring rhetoric about change would (and would not) translate into, in real world terms. We publish this issue at quite a different (but at a similarly significant) historical moment, as the Obama presidency settles into its second year, and Obama himself positions himself for a new campaign for a second term.

As the articles in this issue vividly and elegantly demonstrate, the ongoing debates about Obama's campaign, his presidency, and his significance as a public figure transcend the narrow bounds of American partisan politics, and encourage us to think about broader issues concerning how political personae are created and shaped, how gender and race shape political theater and political decision-making processes, and how racial categories are defined, policed, and modified by a diverse assortment of constituents.

Two of this issue's articles center on the rhetoric used by the Obama campaign during his battle for the presidency in the late 2000s. In "Post-race?: Nation, inheritance, and the contradictory performativity of race in Barack Obama's 'A more perfect union' speech," Bridget Byrne deconstructs one of the most significant speeches of Obama's political career, reflecting on how this ostensibly "post-racial" oration in fact worked to encourage listeners to rethink the ways in which race is positioned in the United States, and how African Americans are situated in narratives about the American past and present. Maryam El-Shall's "Yes, 'Who' Can?: Who 'We' Are in American Liberal Discourse" tackles another significant part of candidate Obama's rhetoric, namely his famous "Yes, we can" slogan. El-Shall reflects on both the promise and the significant limitations of this seemingly inclusive "we"-centered language, tracing the roots and evolution of this particular form of discourse, and examining the ways in which this ostensibly liberating concept in fact often positions racial minorities as "other,"

excludes those who do not conform to narrow definitions of who “we” are, and works to reinforce hierarchies of class and race.

The issues of racial identity, political rhetoric, and the politics of in- and exclusion also permeate Rachel Gorman’s, John Landreau’s, and Khadijah White’s articles. In “ ‘Obama’s my dad’: mixed race suspects, political anxiety, and the new imperialism,” Gorman analyzes the ways in which discourses of white supremacy and constructions of racial identity played out in Obama’s own and the media’s discussions of his mixed racial identity. Focusing on narratives about Obama and his Kenyan father, Gorman explores the ways in which discussions of racial identity intersect with (and often reinforce) post-colonial discourses. Focusing on cultural conceptions of manhood and their impact on the rhetoric and reality of American foreign policy, Landreau’s “Fighting Words: Obama, Masculinity, and the Rhetoric of National Security” considers how Obama’s national security policy (and his discussions of it) are rooted in specific notions of normative American masculinity, specifically in the intensely militaristic, combative form of presidential masculinity which emerged in the United States after World War II. These norms of violent hypermasculinity, Landreau contends, have significant real world consequences, as Obama’s 2009 decision to escalate the conflict in Afghanistan (and his public justifications of this decision) clearly illuminate. White’s “Michelle Obama: Redefining the (White) House-wife” explores the ways in which conceptions of femininity shaped discussions about and the public image of Michelle Obama during the 2008 campaign. Deconstructing four specific speeches from the campaign, White examines the ways in which Michelle Obama and participants in the Obama campaign painstakingly shaped her persona, confronted and challenged dominant stereotypes about African-American femininity, and both played upon and transformed notions of normative, white womanhood.

In addition to our thought-provoking essays, in this issue, we are also pleased to publish insightful reviews of a diverse assortment of significant texts, which similarly raise questions about identity, social hierarchies, and the ongoing struggles for equality along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. The texts under consideration in this issue feature a memoir written by one of the first women to integrate an all-white high school in 1950s Arkansas, a historical account of African-American grassroots activism in twentieth-century Detroit, a film about the place of spirituality in the Alabama prison system, the most iconic poster of the 2008 Obama presidential campaign, an essay collection about

changing notions of family, partnership, love, and marriage edited by Rebecca Walker, and a provocative work of queer theory by Lee Edelman.

We hope that you enjoy this special issue of *thirdspace*, and we invite you to share your thoughts in the 'Comments' section of our journal. (If you're not already a registered user of our site, signing up is easy- for more information, see our readers page: <http://www.thirdspace.ca/journal/information/readers>.) We hope that the questions which these authors raise are ones which you will continue to explore in your own scholarship, and in conversations with your colleagues, students, and community members.

Holly Kent, Editorial: "The Audacity of Hope?" *thirdspace* 10/1 (2011)