

Race and the 2008 u.s. presidential election essay

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Senator Barack Obama is one step closer to the White House now that he has won the Democratic nomination. The road towards the nomination was tedious and difficult; will the road to the presidency be the same? While Obama seems to be an ideal candidate for president, some are saying that his victory is not possible because race will play a significant role in the voting process. This research paper discusses how race will indeed have an impact on the coming presidential elections, as racism has always been present in American politics and campaign. However, there are still other things that could make him win the presidency, things that have made the media respond to him so well. Race and the 2008 U.

S. Presidential Election After a grueling battle against Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nomination, Senator Barack Obama emerged victorious and had come one step closer to the White House. His nomination in itself is a historic moment. It presents the possibility of the first ever African American man to become the president of the Free World.

If Obama wins, his victory will mark a period of social and political change. However, people are questioning if his victory is even possible. It was said that his race may be a hindrance to his political aspirations, as his being African-American may work against him.

Will race have an impact on the 2008 U. S. presidential election? This research paper aims to discuss the possible role that race will play in the election in the light of the racism in American politics in general. This paper will also delve into the media and how they handle the Obama candidacy.

Racism seems to be prevalent in the history of American politics. One example was the 2000 Republican nomination of George W. Bush, who eventually won as president (Bhanot, 2007). His opponent then was John McCain. Those who campaigned for Bush questioned the voting public in South Carolina if they would back McCain “ if he had an illegitimate child with a black woman” (Bhanot, 2007, para. 5).

This question was an inappropriate attack on McCain’s adopted daughter Bridget, who was from Bangladesh. Nonetheless, McCain was no passive victim. He was also guilty of racism. He once referred to those who captured him during the Vietnam War as “ gooks” (Bhanot, 2007, para. 6). He then claimed that that was the nicest term he could use to describe them (Bhanot, 2007).

Two years after, the racist references continue. Mississippi Senator and Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott was in a festive mood in celebration of the 100th birthday of South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond (Bhanot, 2007). In 1948, Thurmond ran for president, in which he supported separation of the blacks and whites. Lott insinuated that the United States would be much better if the country supported Thurmond and his stand on racism.

Lott’s indirect support of racial segregation was met with opposition, forcing him to resign (Bhanot, 2007). All the aforementioned offenders have been from the Republican Party (Bhanot, 2007). However, this does not mean racism is only practiced by a certain group of people. West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd is a Democrat. He was part of the Ku Klux Klan and was the

head of a local chapter. Despite this, he still is the longest serving senator, with nine terms to his name (Bhanot, 2007).

This brief history showed how racism played a role in American politics in the past. The U. S.

election is still months away, so the campaign is a good place to start in determining whether race would really have an impact in the coming elections. Michael Barone, in his article for the U. S. News and World Report entitled The Race Factor in the 2008 Presidential Election, stated that race was not the reason why people reject Obama; they simply do not like him as a person. He argued that race is not the reason why people would hesitate to vote for a black candidate (Barone, 2008). He stated that there is only a small percentage of voters who would not vote for an African American candidate. In his article, he also cited Colin Powell as an example, since he ran for office in 1996.

Barone argues that Powell and Obama are “ not typical of Americans of African descent” (Barone, 2008, para. 0). Even if Powell had Jamaican blood while Obama had Caucasian blood, they still are of African descent (Barone, 2008). Regardless of the small the percentage of non-black voters, they still have an impact in the electoral process.

Race will still play a role in the outcome of the elections. The campaign period for the Democratic nomination is proof that racism still exists. In an article in Insight Magazine, it was reported that the campaign of Hillary Clinton found out about the supposed childhood of Obama (as cited in

Bhanot, 2007). It was said that as a child, Obama attended a seminary for Islamic radicals called madrassa (Bhanot, 2007). In turn, it was indicated that he was concealing the fact that he was a Muslim.

Both accounts are false. These are but racial attacks, as if to insinuate that Obama is linked with terrorism. This may be attributed to the fact that the middle name of Obama is Hussein (Bhanot, 2007).

Another instance in the campaign in which racism became evident involved Obama rival Hillary Clinton. When she was in West Virginia, Clinton claimed that the support of Caucasian Americans for Obama was on the decline (Navarrette, 2008). The statements of Clinton hinted that the reason why people should vote for her or why she will win is because of her skin color. She supposes that her victory is assured by the color of her skin (Navarrette, 2008). This assumption is clearly racist. According to columnist Ruben Navarrette, some Caucasians are struggling for a reason why they are not backing Obama (Navarrette, 2008).

He insisted that racism still exists; this is the reason why people cannot fully grasp the idea of an African-American running for president and winning it. He acknowledges that there are those who still believe in the inferiority of the black race. That is why it is such a difficult thing to comprehend how an African-American like Obama could achieve so much. They simply never realized that having an African-American president was possible (Navarrette, 2008). From the above examples, it already shows that race have played a part and made an impact on the campaign trail. From the aforementioned examples, it can be said that if race already influenced the campaign, it

would surely influence the election itself. Another thing that shows how race may impact the election is through the interest of media towards the Obama's actions.

Race may play a crucial part in the treatment of the media to Obama and his candidacy. This is because the media had exhibited great interest in some of Obama's distinct mannerisms. For instance, there was the influx of media coverage and commentary regarding the bumping of the fists between Obama and his wife Michelle before he officially announced that he was the Democratic nominee (Deggans, 2008). The gesture had long been done, but it never really gained that much attention until this incident. Suddenly the media bombarded the public with pieces regarding the gesture, in an attempt to explain its origins and meaning. The interest of the gesture is caused by one thing: Obama's race. In the Washington Post, Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote that for his introduction of black mannerisms to politics, "Barack is like Black Folks 2.

0" (as cited in Deggans, 2008). The gesture called the attention of the media because of its racial nature. However, the gesture also brought about a racist response. E. D.

Hill, an anchor for the Fox News Channel insinuated that the gesture was a "terrorist fist jab" (as cited in Deggans, 2008). Afterwards, she apologized. The fascination results from his race, and Eric Deggans analyzed the media frenzy in an article whose title says it all: "Media treat Obama like an artifact of a foreign culture" (Deggans, 2008). While it is obvious that race attracts

much media attention, the media was found to have handled the Obama candidacy with much consideration.

In fact, Obama has consistently have been receiving good press. Early on in the campaign, Obama has received positive coverage compared to the other potential candidates (Cost, 2007). Soon, he was receiving the best press among all presidential candidates (Center for Media and Public Affairs [CMPA], 2008). Between December 16, 2007 to January 27, 2008, 84% of the media coverage for Obama had been approving (CMPA, 2008). These statistics can be attributed to what Obama represents.

It was said that compared to other candidates, he is the epitome of the new direction of American politics. He shows what the future of America can be like; he can be an agent for change (CMPA, 2008). Though racism may still exist, the media's treatment to Obama clearly does not show it. In fact, the media is considered as one of Obama's greatest advantages.

The media had always been "enthusiastic" about Obama and his presidential campaign (Friedman, 2007). It cannot be denied that the affirmative response of the media towards Obama had contributed in his present success. It was the media's relentless coverage of Obama which brought him closer to the public. Race may be an issue, but it does not hinder the reception of the media to Obama. Some of the qualities that have endeared him to the press include his "intellect, vitality and charisma" (Friedman, 2007). Indeed, these three work for Obama, as these qualities set him apart from his fellow candidates. In fact, the Washington Post also indicated in a review that Obama was next to Kennedy in terms of becoming

such a political superstar and a potential Chief Executive (as cited in Friedman, 2007).

The preferential response of the media to Obama has attracted the attention of his rivals. Compared to the media's treatment of Obama, the response to Clinton is not as favorable. This is the reason why she and her supporters have been complaining about the unequal and unfair media coverage (Harris ; Vandehei, 2008). Clinton's side pointed out the the press had been " soft" on Obama (Saul, 2008). Her complaints are quite valid.

While Obama has been receiving the best press coverage, Clinton has the worst press among the presidential candidates (CMPA, 2008). Obama has surely benefited from the media advantage that he has. In the history of American politics, racism had always existed.

It still exists today, as evident in the presidential campaign. It can be derived that race will indeed have an impact on the presidential elections, when Barack Obama attempts to become the country's first African-American president. While race may be factor for people to not vote for him, there are still other factors that could bring Obama to the White House. The warm reception of the media to Obama is due to his other qualities, qualities that may prove powerful enough to win him the presidency. Therefore, while race may prove to be a disadvantage to his political ambitions, Obama still has the traits that could make people vote for him.