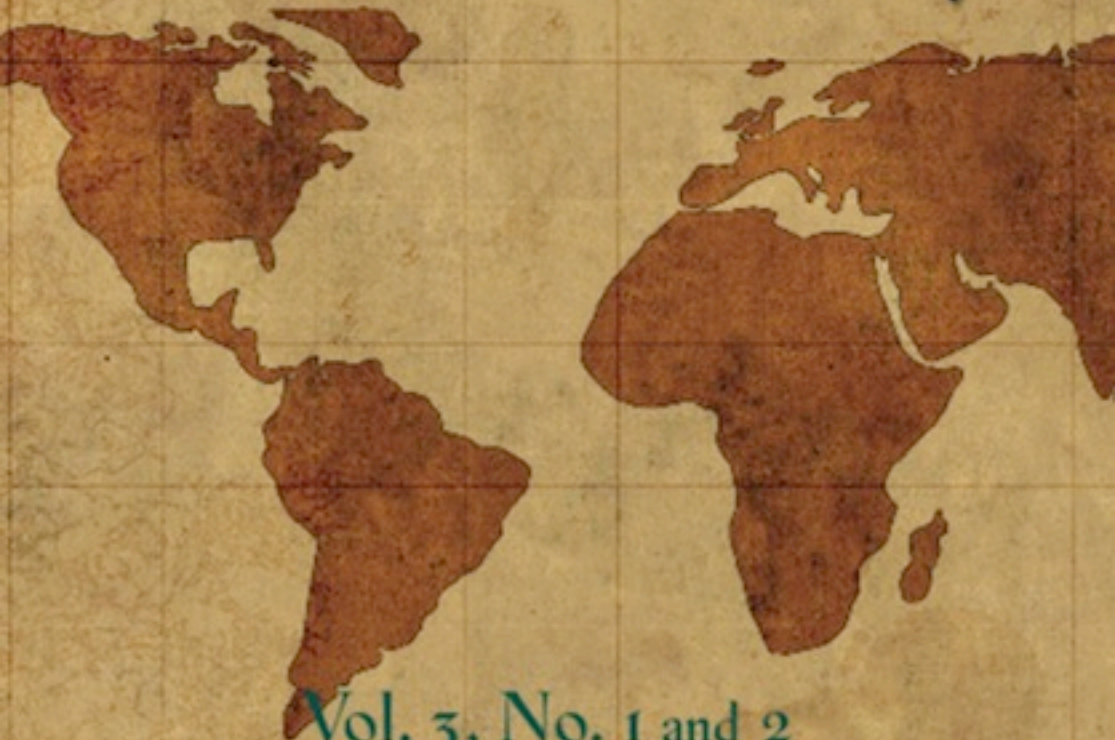
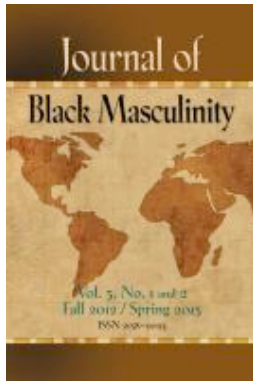


# Journal of Black Masculinity



Vol. 3, No. 1 and 2  
Fall 2012 / Spring 2013

ISSN 2158-9623



*The Journal of Black Masculinity* is a peer-reviewed international publication providing multiple discourses and multiple-discipline-based analyses of issues and/or perspectives with regard to black masculinities. The journal invites empirical, theoretical, and literary scholarship as well as essays, poetry, and art. Submissions from multiple disciplines beyond the humanities and social sciences are encouraged. **The Journal of Black Masculinity** is published three times a year and has a ten percent (10%) acceptance rate. **The Journal of Black Masculinity** also publishes special issues on a periodic basis with guest editors focusing on themed issues.

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C. P. Gause, Founder and Editor-In Chief

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Manuscript submissions, books for review, and correspondence concerning all editorial matters should be sent to: Dr. C. P. Gause, via email: [drtheprofessor@gmail.com](mailto:drtheprofessor@gmail.com). Manuscripts submitted for publication will be peer-reviewed.

Manuscripts should be submitted in electronic form and should not exceed 25 pages in length including references. Manuscripts should **not** contain endnotes and/or footnotes. Authors should follow the APA Publication Manual, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (APA Press, 2010). A style guide for preparing manuscripts is located on the JBM website at <http://www.blackmasculinity.com>.

The Journal of Black Masculinity

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ISBN: 978-1-62646-477-3

ISSN 2158-9623

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Printed in the United States of America.

Volume 3, No. 1 & 2

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Greensboro, NC 27405  
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## **African Americans' Double Consciousness after the Election of Barack Obama: *"This is America after All"***

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### **Abstract**

*The election of Barack Obama was said to usher in a post-racial reality in the United States. We use Critical Race Theory as a lens through which to interpret African Americans' perspectives on this post-racial rhetoric in the month immediately following his election. While Obama was successful in drawing African Americans into his imagined community, they maintained awareness of what W. E. B. Du Bois called "double consciousness." While it has been over a hundred years since Du Bois argued that this split perspective was necessary for African Americans, our analysis reveals that little has changed. Double consciousness remains a necessary tool for African Americans to use in making sense of the racialized realities of twenty-first century America.*

To commit to imagining is to commit to looking beyond the given, beyond what appears to be unchangeable. It is a way of warding off the apathy and the feelings of futility that are the greatest obstacles to any sort of learning and, surely, to

education for freedom...We need imagination. (Maxine Greene, 2009, para. 4)

The election of Barack Obama as the first African American president was an emotional victory for many, particularly for countless African Americans and people of African descent. Black folks around the globe and in this study utilized words like “pride,” “hope,” and “community” to express their overwhelming joy at witnessing Obama become the 44th president of the United States of America. As depicted in the HBO documentary *By The People: The Election of Barack Obama*, millions of Americans, of all ethnicities, felt a renewed sense of nationalism and community with the election of Obama. His election was interpreted to signal entry into a post-racial America, where Americans voted beyond racial lines to elect an African American to the nation’s highest office (Love & Tosolt, 2010). Political pundits, politicians, and Obama himself proclaimed that Whites and people of color reconciled America’s legacy of racism and social inequality with his election (Love & Tosolt, 2010). Obama himself told millions of viewers on the night of his victory that “we can put to rest the myth of racism as a barrier to achievement in this splendid country” (Obama, 2008).

Joe Kline (2009), a *Time Magazine* columnist, contended that Obama’s win ushered in a New America, “a place where the primacy of racial identity – and this includes the old Jesse Jackson version of Black racial identity – has been replaced by the celebration of pluralism, of cross-racial synergy” (p. 23). Former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani suggested that as a nation, “we’ve moved beyond... the whole idea of race and racial separation and unfairness” (as cited in Wise, 2009). While Barack Obama self-identifies as bi-racial, we argue that society, including political pundits, voters, and members of the media, identifies him as African American or Black. Thus, for the purposes of this article, we are purposefully setting aside his self-identification and choosing to identify him as African American or Black. Taken together, these messages create and

transmit the vision of America as a society in which race is no longer a primary signifier of identity.

Although political figures and the mainstream media may have proclaimed that race is no longer an issue in America, examining the realities of African Americans provides a lens to examine these ideological fallacies. The use of statistical data that is itself disaggregated by race reveals the racial inequities within the U.S. For the purposes of this article, we report on differences between non-Hispanic Whites and non-Hispanic African Americans, though statistics involving Hispanics and other racial groups reveal inequity, as well. Table 1 presents statistics that demonstrate differences in income, poverty, and insurance. Perhaps linked to rates of insurance and poverty, in 2010, Black non-Hispanic American adults were 77% more likely to develop diabetes than were White non-Hispanic American adults (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). Rates of HIV/AIDS continue to disproportionately affect Black Americans; in 2008, 46% of those living with HIV were African Americans, while in 2009, 44% of new HIV infections were in Black Americans (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Overall, poverty and health indicators are indicative of disparities based on race.

**Table 1**

***Selected Evidence of Racial Inequalities Within the United States***

Measure	Among White non- Hispanic Americans	Among Black Americans
Difference in household median income from 2007 to 2010	5.4%	10.1%
Growth in rates of poverty from 2009 to 2010	0.5%	1.6%
Percent of children uninsured	6.9%	11.0%

Note: Statistics are drawn from DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2011

Within educational indicators, these same disparities appear. As Table 2 demonstrates, high school and baccalaureate degree completion rates are different by race.

**Table 2**

***Selected Evidence of Racial Inequalities Within Education***

Measure	Among White non- Hispanic students	Among Black students
High school drop out rate, 2009	5.5%	9.7%
Baccalaureate degree completion within 6 years, 2010	60%	40%

Note: Statistics are drawn from Aud et al., 2011

Finally, lest these disparities be argued as evidence of failure on the part of individual school districts, Table 3 compares the drop out rates among heavily non-White districts within the 100 largest districts in the U.S. with the overall drop-out rate across the 100 districts.

Table 3

*Drop Out Rates in Selected Large Districts*

District	Percent non-White students	Drop out rate
Average across all 100 largest districts	71.1%	5.1%
City of Chicago School District 299	91.1%	16.3%
Memphis City School District	93.0%	11.5%
Detroit City School District	97.4%	11.7%
Denver County 1	77.2%	13.8%
San Antonio Independent School District	97.2%	10.9%
Cleveland Municipal	84.4%	13.4%

Note: Statistics are drawn from Sable, Plotts, & Mitchell, 2010

These statistics paint a clear picture regarding life in America: disparities are present and are based on race.

However, current post-racial rhetoric ignores the aforementioned issues of inequality in order to celebrate Obama's election and bolster colorblind politics. Thus, the dominant discourse of a post-racial America, as influenced by the media and the rhetoric

of Obama and others, has created an untenable reality for many African Americans. In other words, African Americans live a “double life,” or what W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1994) would refer to as double consciousness:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 5)

In this paper, we use the term “double consciousness” to signify how African Americans put their racial and political identities at odds to celebrate the achievements of Obama and embrace post-racial rhetoric, while living with and acknowledging the day-to-day realities of racism in America. This study sought to examine how ten African Americans, male and female, negotiated their levels of consciousness when confronted by two opposing narratives: post-racial discourse and the persistent legacy of racism and White supremacy. Thus, this study juxtaposed the election of Obama with Black Americans’ feelings of racial and national group identities, as well as issues of Black identity.

### **Critical Race Theory**

The U.S. ushered in its first African American president more than a century following Du Bois’ contention that the American Negro, “simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face” (1903/1994, p. 5). Du Bois utilized race “as a theoretical lens for assessing social inequity” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 14). In its infancy, critical race scholarship, now known as Critical Race Theory (CRT), drew from the works of Du Bois, as he was “confident that

social-scientific investigation could be a vehicle for black emancipation” (Hackney, 1998, p. 142). Derrick Bell, a trailblazer in the development of CRT, mirrored Du Bois as he utilized scientific investigation to critique race and racism in America and civil rights legislation (Hackney, 1998). In Du Bois’ (1903/1994) most revered and bravura work *The Souls of Black Folk*, he blatantly states, “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line” (p. 1). Equally, Bell perceived America’s racial legacy as “permanent and indestructible” (Bell, 1992, p. x). According to Yosso (2005), CRT “listens to Du Bois’ racial insight” (p. 74). Thus, CRT scholars view race and racism as vital parts of American society deeply embedded within America’s framework (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989; Omi & Winant, 1994).

Nonetheless, CRT challenges racial oppression as it draws upon paradigms of intersectionality to advance social justice (Collins, 1998). We utilized CRT as a mode of analysis to reveal the permanence of racism within society. Even as Obama is well into his presidency, African Americans and people of color are still struggling with the simultaneously insidious, yet inconspicuous, twenty-first century racism and White supremacy, exemplified in such practices as racial profiling, housing discrimination, racial mandatory sentencing guidelines in cases involving cocaine and crack, and predatory lending of subprime mortgages (Wise, 2009). As racism and society’s ideas regarding race shift and evolve, modern racism becomes more palpable. Although 42% of White Americans voted for a Black president, there has been little to no change of the social, economical, and educational trajectory of Black folks in the U.S (Wise, 2009).

As a framework, CRT allows us to explicitly investigate social inequalities arising through race and racism. Central to CRT are the following tenets: racism is a permanent component of American life; the legitimacy and promotion of the personal narratives of people of color to analyze and understand racial inequality; and challenging the ideas of neutrality, colorblindness, and meritocracy (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Lynn, 1999; Solorzano, 1998). Through the lens of CRT, our participants’ voices

become central to the analysis of Obama's post-racial narratives alongside issues of racial inequality.

### **Imagined Community, Democratic Imagination, Racial Identity, and Belonging**

Obama's election was not only "historic" because it ushered the first African American into the nation's highest office, but what is also fascinating how the first post-boomer candidate utilized social networking sites and new communication technologies, such as Facebook, Twitter, and cell phone texting messaging, to transcend geographical, racial, religious, gender, economical, age, and sexuality boundaries to create "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) within our "democratic imaginations" (Perrin, 2006). In his book *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson redefined the concept of nationalism as a political ideology constructed by "imagined" political communities and feelings of democratic connectedness. Benedict argued that imagined communities were different than actual communities because their members have limited to no face-to-face interaction. He wrote, "I propose the following definition of nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members" (p. 6). However, Benedict argued that community members could imagine connectedness for the greater good of mankind and the sense of belonging to a nation. Perrin (2006) contended that our "democratic imaginations," are "fabricate[d] from our experiences in civic life, along with those in other domains such as work, family, and neighborhood. We use this democratic imagination to tell us when and why to get involved in politics, how to do so, and when and how to stay away" (p. 227). These two frameworks, democratic imagination and imagined communities, examined within the context of the 2008 presidential campaign and Obama's election, illustrate how the idea of community is fluid with social and political ties.

Collins (2009) argues, “The construct of community may lie at the heart of politics” (p. 10). Moreover, without nationalism and democratic connectedness, community can be a contradictory and competitive space as social groups differ by race, age, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity (Collins, 2009). We argue that democratic imagination and imagined communities underpin the modern day “cultural maintenance” (Lyubansky & Eidelson, 2005) of Black folks, as people of color simultaneously negotiate their racial and national group identities (i.e. double consciousness). Moreover, Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness anchors contemporary scholarship regarding theories of acculturation and Black identity (Lyubansky & Eidelson, 2005).

Acculturation theory examines how individuals from different cultures acquire methods to accommodate each other in order to minimize conflict (Persons, 1987). In 1914, sociologist Robert Park drew from an ecological framework to theorize a three-stage model of acculturation — contact, accommodation, and assimilation (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Berry (1980) expanded Park’s theory of acculturation by assessing that there are four modes of acculturation: assimilation, integration, rejection, and deculturation. According to Padilla & Perez (2003), “The importance of Berry’s model was that it recognized the importance of multicultural societies, minority individuals and groups, and the fact that individuals have a choice in the matter of how far they are willing to go in the acculturation process” (p. 37). Berry’s (1980) framework also suggests that individuals occupy dual space with two intersecting issues: “cultural maintenance (i.e., Is it considered to be of value to maintain one’s cultural identity and characteristics?) and cultural contact (i.e., It is considered to be of value to maintain relationships with the dominant society)” (Lyubansky & Eidelson, 2005, p. 8).

In contrast to acculturation theory, theories of Black racial identity development emphasize how people of color respond to racism, subordination, and hegemony in ways that impact their cognitive, social, and personality development (Baldwin, 1984; Cross,

1971; Du Bois, 1903/1994; Hammack, 2010; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). According to Winant (1995)

Racial identity outweighs all other identities. We are compelled to think racially, to use the racial categories and the meaning systems into which we have been socialized...

It is not possible to be “color blind,” for race is a basic element of our identity.... For better or worse, without a clear racial identity, an American is in danger of having no identity. (pp. 31-32)

The racial identity of African Americans is a heavily researched topic that spans over a hundred years of research (Allport, 1954; Clark & Clark, 1939; Du Bois, 1903/1994; Horowitz, 1939). However, before the work of Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous, (1998), research surrounding African American racial identity employed two approaches: mainstream and underground. The mainstream approached racial identity with an emphasis on the universal aspects of being African American or a person of color (Cross, 1991; Gaines & Reed, 1994, 1995), which drew from the work of Du Bois, who was concerned with what it means to be Black in America. Conversely, the underground approach focused on “documenting the qualitative meaning of being African American, with an emphasis on the unique cultural and historical experiences of African Americans” (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Moving the research of racial identity forward, in 1998, Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous combined the strengths of the two approaches to create The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI). The model explores four dimensions of African American racial identity: salience, centrality, regard, and ideology. The researchers argued that MMRI captures the “diversity of the African American community” and “delineates a process by which racial identity may influence behavior at the level of the event through its conceptualization of racial identity” (p. 33). As a result, MMRI focuses not only on how individuals construct racial concepts regarding one’s self, but also how individuals consider, navigate, and

negotiate other personal and group identities (i.e. citizenship, community, political party lines). The creation of MMRI was groundbreaking to the study of racial identity because African Americans report identifying with their racial identity above all other identities (Cota & Dion, 1986; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

The concepts of racial identity, MMRI, imagined communities, democratic imagination, and acculturation theory are even more salient today as people of color wrestle with their racial identity versus their group/national identity, given the context of an African American holding the country's highest office. Our study explored how participants conceptualized the victory of Obama as their call to be a part of our nation's imagined and democratic community, while fearing for the safety of Obama and his family due to American hideous legacy of racism and hate crimes against Black leaders. Blacks in the study employed "double thoughts" or "double ideals" (i.e. double consciousness) to rationalize America's hypocrisy as a nation that elected a Black man to the presidency, but ignores the systematic effects of racial inequality as a result of racism.

## **Methods**

Through the lens of CRT (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006), we purposefully sampled (Patton, 2002) a diverse group of U.S. adults. Participants were invited to participate in a 12 question open-ended survey via email on November 6, 2008. After our initial invitation email, we asked individuals to recommend others who might be interested in participating, allowing snowball sampling to broaden our sample (Cresswell, 2007). At the conclusion of data collection, which marked the month following the election of Barack Obama (ending on December 4, 2008), we had responses from 57 individuals. Participants were asked to self-identify in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, or any social marker of their choice. For example, one participant identified as "Black, Republican, and Roman Catholic," another identified "African American and gay"; two more participants

identified as “White, atheist, and Democrat” and “biracial, straight, and liberal”.

After data collection was over, we first analyzed the data holistically reading the entire collection of responses from each participant. Next, we independently developed a series of open codes, which were then grouped into axial codes (Creswell, 2007). For the purpose of this analysis, we are reporting on the codes we referred to as “imagined community & democracy,” and “double consciousness.”

### **Modern-Day Double Consciousness Imagined Community and Democracy**

No matter their race or ethnicity, all the study’s participants felt connected to their fellow Americans by Obama’s race-neutral rhetoric of racial reconciliation and the possibilities available to hard-working Americans. In 2007, when then-senator Barack Obama announced his candidacy for president outside the Old State Capitol building in Springfield, Illinois, he told millions of Americans that:

That is why this campaign can't only be about me. It must be about us -- it must be about what we can do together. This campaign must be the occasion, the vehicle, of your hopes, and your dreams. It will take your time, your energy, and your advice -- to push us forward when we're doing right, and to let us know when we're not. This campaign has to be about reclaiming the meaning of citizenship, restoring our sense of common purpose, and realizing that few obstacles can withstand the power of millions of voices calling for change. By ourselves, this change will not happen. Divided, we are bound to fail. (Obama, 2007)

Obama’s words, his own racial identity as a biracial American, and his race-neutral message of change and hope which de-emphasized race,

effectively silenced the structural issues that reveal modern racism (Love & Tosolt, 2010). According to Love and Tosolt:

Obama's presidency in terms of race and the existence of racism is complex. His avoidance of aligning himself with a particular race or race-specific policies permits his Whiteness, as Whiteness functions without racial or ethnic markers. As a result, Obama is able to transcend his Blackness as Whites make an exception and remove Obama from being grouped with regular Black folks...Thus, the traditional rules of racial hierarchy do not apply to Obama because of his post-racial message and his unique personal narrative that America has embraced. (p. 26-27)

The study's participants, regardless of racial or ethnic identity, political affiliation, religion, or sexuality felt part of a larger community via Obama's personal narrative and campaign rhetoric. America's racial past and present were put aside to become a part of the "imagined community" which Obama created utilizing the social media to fuel the democratic process and unite our participants. Obama's messages of community gave our participants a sense of invisible connectedness to all Americans. When asked about the impact of Obama's election, almost all responses spoke to a sense of community:

- His message of cooperation and community working together to make things better is real. He seems to have the ability to make wise and sound decisions based on how he handled difficulties when they arose (African-American female)
- I think it will inspire me to be a better citizen to my community (Native, African, Irish American female)
- I hope I will be become more active in the community and build a world where hopes and dreams can become a reality for every citizen (White female)

The respondents above expressed a straightforward belief that Obama's election transcended societal markers such race, ethnicity, gender, religion, career, sexual orientation, family composition, and/or political affiliation. To many, Obama's election stood as empirical evidence that Americans "embraced the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past" (Obama, 2008):

- I am more willing to act on his behalf than I have ever been in my lifetime (African-American)
- I have never seen so much joy in any community in my lifetime (White female)
- Inspired to do more for my community; like I can actually make a difference (Caucasian female)

One senior participant reflected on her life experiences in reaction to the election of Obama and her renewed sense of community in her later years of life:

I grew up in the south, moved away & returned upon retirement. This election has renewed my confidence in my country's potential to be "all it can be" for all of its citizens. It has given me greater respect for people of other races who put aside their bias to support the best candidate. It tells me our country had, indeed, come a long way. This election has increased my pride as an African American. I believe we, as a race, are viewed differently now by others. Others now know WE CAN. I hope our African Americans who have felt hopeless will now renew their belief that WE CAN in America & increase determination to excel with confidence in self & family (African-American Woman)

The comments above express the pride and communal spirit Americans felt after Obama's election. However, just months after President Obama was sworn in, racial tensions emerged when Black Harvard

professor Henry Louis Gates was arrested for “breaking in” to his own home (Jan, 2009). The incident spawned national controversy regarding race, racism, and racial profiling. At the same time in Texas, police in riot gear refereed a standoff between screaming Black separatists and White supremacists (Katz, 2009). More recently, national attention has been drawn to the racialized aspects of the murder of Trayvon Martin and less-publicized victims such as Canard Arnold, Ramarley Graham, and Kenneth Chamberlain (*Some cases being compared to Trayvon Martin*, 2012). The next section of this paper underscores how our participants who identified as people of color reconciled their beliefs that America, as a whole, and non-Black Americans, in particular, moved beyond race to elect Obama as the first African American president, while paralleling those beliefs with their knowledge of the racialized reality of people of color in the U.S.

### **Double Consciousness and Hate Crimes**

We have chosen to combine the themes “double consciousness” and “hate crime” because our participants simultaneously drew from their feelings of racial pride and hopefulness in Obama’s election while voicing their fears for his life as America’s first Black president. Further, we only considered the responses of participants who self-identified as “Black,” “African American,” or “biracial” in this analysis, as we were interested in comparing modern day responses to Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness. Our participants expressed Du Bois’ double consciousness in describing the ever-present duality of celebrating Obama’s victory in the shadow of the harsh reality of racism. For example, two male participants stated that:

- I never thought I would see this day, but I was amazed, overwhelmed, emotional and satisfied...all rapped [*sic*] up into one (African American Male)
- I am proud of him and am more hopeful than at any time in my life (African American Male)

However, when the same two men were asked whether they had any fears or doubts, both participants expressed trepidation for Obama's life:

- My only fear is his safety, but in regards to his presidency honestly I really don't have any fears! (African American Male)
- That he will be undermined by parties on all sides and possibly be murdered (African American Male)

The comments above express the simultaneous racial pride in Obama's election and the fear the participants have for Obama's life because of his race. While these two participants made their seemingly-contradictory comments in response to two different questions, another participant revealed her double consciousness in a single response:

I was both overwhelmingly proud of Barack Obama and fearful for him at the same time. Although he won the position by a huge majority there still remain a substantial percentage of racist people in this country! I keep abreast, via the internet, on the post-election racial threats to Barack and to other Black Americans....That he and other black people will become targeted for violence does not surprise me -- this is America after all. My greatest fear is that the racists, by their very nature as the ignorant, hate-filled scum that they are, will assassinate him (African American female)

In this response, this participant conveyed her fear for both Obama's life and for a rise in hate crimes against Blacks as retaliation for the election of a Black president. Some participants spoke to less-specific fears about violence, but indicated fear of violence nonetheless:

- He has brought the whole slavery issue in this country full circle. The steps that he will be walking to the White House

were built by slaves literally and figuratively...It is my prayer that he and his family and those advising him will be safe (African American female)

- It has given me greater respect for people of other races who put aside their bias to support the best candidate. It tells me our country had, indeed, come a long way. This election has increased my pride as an African American...Fears: partisanship "games" to promote his downfall without regard for the country, physical harm (African American Female)

Although some of our participants did not articulate a concern for Obama's safety, they did speak to the double consciousness of Black folks by recognizing the permanence of racism in America (Bell, 1992), while also feeling a sense of national pride and unity as African Americans by Obama's election.

- Race will always be an issue in America!... I am very proud!! I never thought I would see a Black man become President... I also hope that America will be more respected by other countries and we will be able to give aid to Africa (Black Female)
- I believe some Americans tried to pretend it didn't exist, I believe others only saw his race. I also think there was a lot of subtle racism exhibited by the Republican Party. I was very proud and happy for him, our country and the world (Bi-racial Male)
- Because Americans seldom have real conversations about race, there is always an undercurrent of racial malcontent...I am African American and fully present in the reality of what and how much my ancestors have been thru for me (as a woman and black) to vote and be counted. This meant a crossroad to sincere greatness that I believe has been under the American radar for too long (African American Female)

- I honestly didn't think he would win. Not at all do I think racism is gone or ever will be. But I think racial relations is [*sic*] better than I thought it was. I felt proud that we are not as hypocritical as we may have been once (African American and Korean)

Taken as a whole, these four participants expressed double consciousness regarding the meaning of Obama's election. On one hand, they are openly hopeful about the progress that his election seems to indicate. However, they are simultaneously wary of becoming too hopeful; their comments indicate a hesitance to believe that the symbolism of his election will translate into any meaningful difference in terms of race relations in this country. These four participants perhaps best capture the double consciousness deployed by some African Americans as they navigate the rhetoric surrounding Barack Obama's election through both American and African American eyes.

### **The Continued Necessity of Double Consciousness**

The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States of America was widely described as evidence that the country had entered a post-racial period. However, statistics from a variety of measures indicate that there remain very real differences in expectancies for Americans based on race. Over a century ago, W. E. B. Du Bois theorized that African Americans were forced to view their lives through two separate lenses: an American lens and an African American lens. The contemporary work of Critical Race Theory (CRT) echoes Du Bois, arguing that racism is a permanent fixture in American society. Using the lens of CRT, and considering the concepts of racial identity, The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), imagined communities, democratic imagination, and acculturation theory, we sought to unpack the rhetoric surrounding Obama's election, particularly through the voices of African

Americans themselves. We found two major themes: belonging to an imagined community and double consciousness.

Participants in our study expressed acceptance of the dominant narrative of Obama's election signaling change in our society. Our participants used Obama's own words, social media and the internet, and juxtaposed modern events with remembered ones to confer meaning about change. They spoke of belonging to a community, feeling called to action, and believing that hope and change had triumphed over what had been in the past. However, our participants demonstrated Du Bois' double consciousness as they simultaneously expressed fear for the safety of Obama and his family. The fears of these respondents are rooted in centuries of racial hate crimes: the lynchings of thousands of Black men in the South; the killing of four little Black girls in the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church bombing; the murder of Emmett Till; the assassinations of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and the gunning down of unarmed Amadou Diallo in the streets of New York City. However, racial violence is not a relic of the past.

Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights organization devoted to combating hate and bigotry, identified a net change in the number of hate groups from 888 in 2007 to 1,018 in 2011 (R. Sturtevant, personal communication, March 12, 2012). In addition, the number of militias has grown from 131 in 2007 to 1,274 in 2011 (R. Sturtevant, personal communication, March 12, 2012). Such groups "define themselves as opposed to the 'New World Order,' engage in groundless conspiracy theorizing, or advocate or adhere to extreme antigovernment doctrines" (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012). In May of 2010, Obama took aim at antigovernment groups when he spoke to the graduating class at University of Michigan by stating: "What troubles me is when I hear people say that all of government is inherently bad...When our government is spoken of as some menacing, threatening foreign entity, it ignores the fact that in our democracy, government is us" (Obama, 2010). Thus, the resurgent antigovernment movement and possible hate crimes against people of

color present a reality that necessitates a dual level of consciousness for our participants of color.

As we head into another presidential election cycle, it remains to be seen whether President Obama will be able to win re-election. One strategy that proved effective in the 2008 campaign included appealing to Americans' sense of shared community. This strategy required that African Americans suspend their double consciousness regarding race. While this strategy was effective four years ago, some African Americans were expressing doubt regarding a post-racial society even in the immediate days after his election. While the fears our participants spoke regarding physical violence to the president have thankfully not been realized, the discussion above indicates that violence remains a real threat. When taken together with the statistics presented in the introduction of this article, the daily events experienced by many African Americans still require the use of double consciousness. Clearly, we are not in a post-racial society. President Obama's ability to again appeal to African Americans to abandon the lens of double consciousness, as well as to convince Americans of all races and ethnicities that they are all members of a single community, may be key in his attempt at re-election.

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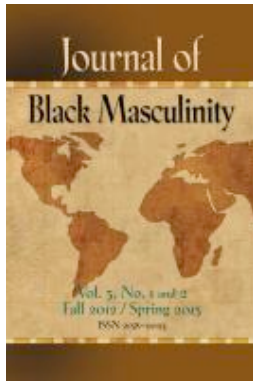
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**Vol. 3 Nos. 1 & 2**

**Fall 2012 / Spring 2013**

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