The Obamas and a (Post) Racial America?

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CHAPTER 3

Black Man in the White House: Ideology and Implicit Racial Bias in the Age of Obama

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> "We cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday
> pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve."
> —Barack H. Obama, Inaugural Address, January 20, 2009

The election of Barack Obama—a man of mixed-race ancestry who identifies himself as, and is generally regarded as, Black—to the United States presidency on November 4, 2008, was understandably heralded as a pivotal moment in the complex, sometimes calamitous trajectory of race relations in the United States. The *New York Times* proclaimed "Obama Elected President as Racial Barrier Falls" (Nagourney, 2008), and Anna Quindlen (2008) noted in *Newsweek* that it is "impossible to overstate what that means to this nation." To be sure, Obama's candidacy and election to the nation's highest political office were possible only because of tremendous national changes that have taken place during his own lifetime. For example, it was 4 years *after* Obama's birth that the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Loving v. Virginia* that anti-miscegenation statutes were unconstitutional. That the son of a White Kansan woman and a Black Kenyan man—who could have been legally prevented from marrying in several regions of the United States—was ultimately elected to the presidency reflects a remarkable, if not seismic, shift in American racial attitudes and policies (e.g., Bobo & Dawson, 2009).

To a number of observers, Obama's election marked the dawn of a new "post-racial" era in which "America is now officially beyond racism" (Steele, 2008; *see also* Crowley, 2008; Tierney, 2008). A Google search for "Obama" and "post-racial" (or "post racial" or "postracial") in November 2009 yielded more than 400,000 search results. Commentators opined, "We are supposed to be living in post-racial times" (Givhan, 2008) and "For many people in America, Obama's election ushered in a post-racial era that was expected to push race to the back burner of our national consciousness" (Wickham, 2009). Such conclusions were probably hubristic from the start. For one thing, the overwhelming majority of Obama's support came from the politically liberal—that is,

least authoritarian and racially biased—segment of the United States population (e.g., *see* Jost, 2006; Jost, West, & Gosling, 2009; Nosek, Banaji, & Jost, 2009; Reyna, Henry, Korfmacher, & Tucker, 2006; Sears, Van Laar, Carrillo, & Kosterman, 2004; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). Moreover, the election of one Black man to high public office with the votes of less than 25% of the country's adult population (http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/president/), following a campaign that was itself far from post-racial (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/01/barackobama.uselections2008), hardly satisfies the logical criteria for the existence of a tectonic shift in Americans' racial attitudes. Still, it would be an important historical achievement if even half of the voting public were accurately said to inhabit a truly "post-racial" world.[2]

In this chapter, we explore what Obama's election does—and, just as importantly, does *not*—mean for understanding racial attitudes and intergroup relations in the contemporary United States. In so doing, we highlight findings from the social sciences (especially experimental social psychology) pertaining to the existence of robust and pervasive racial bias at an implicit (i.e., relatively nonconscious and uncontrollable) level of awareness (*see also* Jost, Rudman et al., 2009). We start by assessing the notion that Obama's election reflects a sea change in racial sentiment. Does it really mean that race-based animus has been eliminated or even subdued? We summarize findings from several large-scale survey and experimental studies on implicit and explicit racial attitudes. These studies suggest that not only is the United States still quite some distance from becoming a "post-racial" society but also that implicit and explicit racial bias *did* play a significant role in the 2008 election and in reactions to Obama's first year in the White House.

Furthermore, we contend that the relationship between Obama's presidency and racial attitudes is likely to be dynamic rather than static. His election provides some insight into Americans' opinions about racial matters in late 2008, but his tenure as president may well affect attitudes toward African-Americans in ensuing years, for better or worse. One of the key contributions social psychology can make is to highlight the analytic distinction between individuals' implicit or automatic evaluations and the explicit attitudes and behaviors they exhibit because of, or in spite of, these evaluations. Research on the psychology of prejudice suggests that much "post-racial" behavior represents not an absence of bias but rather an active attempt to control it (e.g., Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Glaser & Knowles, 2008; Plant & Devine, 1998).

Indeed, in keeping with past research on motivation to control racism, some evidence suggests that Obama's presidency could ironically *worsen* race relations in the United States, to the extent that it encourages people to dismiss

evidence of racial discrimination and stop striving for egalitarian goals (e.g., Effron, Cameron, & Monin, 2009; Kaiser, Drury, Spalding, Cheryan, & O'Brien, 2009). Near the end of the chapter, we review the first few studies to investigate whether Obama's election vanquishes or excuses racial prejudice; the evidence at this point is mixed. In a very real sense, the social psychological jury is still "out" when it comes to knowing whether the Obama presidency will help or hurt the cause of reducing racial prejudice at home and abroad. Any transformative effects that come from having a Black president may well be apparent only much later, as a result of comparative or historical analysis or by examining changes in implicit bias over time (e.g., Schmidt & Nosek, 2010). At the time of writing, Obama has completed only a year and a half in office; because we lack the crystal ball that would enable sound prognostication about the future of race relations in the United States, our remarks are necessarily speculative. Nevertheless, social psychological theories and methods may prove useful for understanding the long-term effects of having an African-American president on both implicit and explicit attitudes.

EVALUATING THE POST-RACIAL CLAIM

We are by no means alone in exploring racial attitudes and behaviors in light of Obama's electoral success (e.g., *see* the 2009 special issues of the *DuBois Review* and *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*). In an especially brash dismissal of the notion that race continues to matter in American politics, one *New York Times* editorialist asked provocatively, "Where Have all the Bigots Gone?" only a few days after the election. In this article, Tierney (2008) wondered how to reconcile social scientific data showing persistent negativity toward Blacks with the election of a Black president. He asked: "After Mr. Obama's victory, should social scientists reconsider their research—and their image of the bigoted American?" Crowley (2008) raised similar questions in *The New Republic*, claiming (quite mistakenly, in retrospect) that "even white supremacists don't hate Obama."

As behavioral scientists, we are reticent to draw any general conclusion on the basis of a single event—no matter how important or extraordinary. Rather, what is needed is systematic study and careful observation of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of large numbers of individuals using multiple, converging methods of analysis. Furthermore, the question "Can an African-American be elected President?" is and always was the wrong criterion for determining whether the United States has entered a "post-racial" phase. As Mahzarin Banaji (2008) noted, did anyone seriously believe that sexism ceased to exist in Great Britain the moment that Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister?

It is likewise perilous to try to draw conclusions about the attitudes of an entire nation. Nevertheless, if one is determined to identify some kind of national litmus test, we would propose this: "Would a Black candidate and a White candidate, who are equivalent in all respects other than race, be judged and evaluated in the same way(s) for the identical position (elected or otherwise)?" Of course, Obama and his opponent in the general election, John McCain, differed on many dimensions—not only in terms of their race but also age, experience, background, political ideology, party affiliation, and support for specific policy positions. Knowing only the outcome of the election, it is impossible to distinguish between two possibilities: (1) anti-Black racial bias played no role in the 2008 election, and (2) the degree of anti-Black bias, although substantial, was not great enough among his potential supporters to trump all of the other factors that determined the election's result. In other words, Obama might have been elected *despite* continued racial bias. Only by creating an Obama doppelgänger, who is 100% White but otherwise identical to the original, could one directly compare votes garnered by two candidates who differ only in terms of race.[3] Because this is ethically and technologically out of the question, we draw on established social scientific methodologies to gauge the role of race in electoral politics and in contemporary American culture more generally. Fortunately, these techniques provide ways of isolating the effects of racial categorization on human judgment and decision making (e.g., see Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005; Schneider, 2004; Stangor, 2000).

Racial Attitudes, Beliefs, and Opinions

Americans report increasingly tolerant and egalitarian attitudes. In the decades since the Civil Rights movement and the end of Jim Crow segregation, Americans have generally reported more positive racial attitudes and beliefs. Overt racism and support for anti-Black discrimination have markedly declined (Bobo & Dawson, 2009; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997; Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). Although 55% of White survey respondents in 1954 supported the notion that White job candidates should have "the first chance at any kind of job," by 1972 97% of White respondents rejected this policy (Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997). Moreover, White Americans' professed willingness to vote for a Black presidential candidate also shifted considerably. Whereas 53% of respondents stated that they would vote for a qualified Black presidential candidate from their own party in a 1953 Gallup poll, 94% reported a willingness to do so in 2007 (Jones, 2007). The trend toward increasing racial egalitarianism appeared first among political liberals; over time, conservatives came to hold more positive explicit attitudes toward African-Americans as well (e.g., *see* Nosek et al., 2009).

Less conscious bias persists. At the same time, an abundance of scientific evidence from social and cognitive psychology makes clear that much (if not most) of social thought takes place outside of conscious awareness (e.g., Bargh & Williams, 2006; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). For many decades, psychologists have known that memory and perception are subject to *explicit* (i.e., more deliberative, conscious) processes that can be articulated and reflected upon as well as *implicit* (i.e., less conscious) processes that are relatively inaccessible but can nonetheless have important consequences for behavior. It was hardly a gigantic conceptual leap, then, when social psychologists began to demonstrate that social sentiments—attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices—similarly operate at both implicit and explicit levels of awareness (e.g., Devine, 1989; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Explicit preferences correspond to lay definitions of "attitudes"—that is, what individuals say when they are asked how much they like opera, the Boston Red Sox, Apple computers, Mexican-Americans, Democrats, or a given presidential candidate. At the same time, individuals hold *implicit* or automatic evaluative responses toward the same attitude objects, and these implicit responses may or may not be consistent with their verbal self-reports (e.g., Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000; Wittenbrink & Schwarz, 2007).

Although many specific research paradigms have been developed to assess implicit attitudes and evaluations (including stereotypes and prejudices), the largest class relies on response latency measures—that is, estimating the length of time it takes to perform various mental operations (*see* Jost, Rudman et al., 2009, for a primer). The logic of this method is rooted in several decades of research in cognitive psychology establishing that response latency (i.e., reaction time) indexes the strength of associations between different concepts. For example, people respond more quickly to the word "robin" than "arm" after having been exposed briefly to the word "bird" (Neely, 1977). Eventually, work of this kind on *semantic priming* was extended to social domains through the use of *evaluative priming* techniques (e.g., Fazio et al., 1986, 1995). These latter techniques measure the relative strength of associations between concepts such as "Americans" and value-laden judgments such as "good" and "bad."

The Implicit Association Test. The Implicit Association Test (or IAT) is simply another method of using reaction time to gauge implicit evaluations by measuring how quickly people associate positively (vs. negatively) valenced words with White (vs. Black) faces or names, respectively (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Lane, Banaji, Nosek, & Greenwald, 2007; Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2007). A summary of more than 2.5 million IATs completed at a public website (http://implicit.harvard.edu) provides several clear

conclusions (Nosek, Smyth et al., 2007). First, on average, people exhibit marked implicit preferences for socially advantaged (or high status) groups over disadvantaged (or low status) groups (e.g., White over Black, light-skinned over dark-skinned people, and straight people over gays and lesbians).[4] Second, many individuals also show robust and pervasive implicit stereotypical associations linking, for example, Black men with weapons or men (more than women) with science (Nosek, Smyth et al., 2007). Third, implicit biases against members of stigmatized or disadvantaged groups (including African-Americans) are frequently more pronounced than explicit biases, suggesting that people may be unaware of some of their social preferences or are reluctant to admit to them.

Research reveals that implicit evaluations and stereotypes are only modestly correlated with explicit evaluations and stereotypes at the individual level of analysis (*see* Hofmann, Gawronski, Gschwender, Le, & Schmitt, 2005, for a meta-analytic review). Such evidence is typically taken to indicate that implicit and explicit evaluations capture unique or distinctive aspects of one's overall attitudinal system (e.g., Banaji & Heiphetz, 2010). If this is true, it is essential to consider both implicit and explicit attitudes when evaluating the claim that the United States has entered a "post-racial" era. Unfortunately, the results from the largest study conducted to date do not provide grounds for optimism. Schmidt and Nosek (2010) examined implicit racial attitudes among more than 470,000 visitors to the Project Implicit website prior to the moment that Obama announced his presidential candidacy, throughout the campaign, and even into his first few months in office. Average levels of implicit racial bias remained virtually unchanged among members of every demographic group tested during the 2.5-year period. The results were unambiguous: Moderate levels of implicit racial bias persisted before, during, and after Barack Obama's election.

Do milliseconds matter? Still, one might wonder, as did Chugh (2004), whether "milliseconds matter." Does knowing a person's score on an implicit measure of bias really help us to predict his or her behavior? Some critics claim that it does not (e.g., Tetlock & Mitchell, 2008, 2009), but the scientific consensus on this question is a resounding "yes." A meta-analysis of dozens of studies reveals that implicit stereotypes and prejudices are, in fact, *better* predictors of some forms of behavior (including discriminatory behavior) than are explicit attitudes (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). A comprehensive detailing of this research literature, which clearly establishes the predictive utility of implicit measures, is well beyond the scope of the present chapter (for reviews, *see* Hardin & Banaji, in press; Jost, Rudman et al., 2009; Lane et al., 2007; Nosek, Smyth et al., 2007). Here we describe just a few representative findings to convey a sense of the literature as a whole.

One of the earliest studies in this tradition revealed that implicit anti-Black attitudes (as measured with an evaluative priming technique) predicted less friendly behavior toward a Black experimenter (Fazio et al., 1995). Subsequent work has shown that anti-Black bias (estimated by other implicit measures) is associated with negative nonverbal behavior directed at a Black partner, including the decision to sit farther away from him or her (e.g., Amodio & Devine, 2006). Similarly, participants who hold stronger anti-fat attitudes at an implicit level maintain greater social distance from an overweight interaction partner (Bessenoff & Sherman, 2000). Finally, White college students who harbor more negative implicit racial attitudes are less likely to be living with their Black roommates at the end of the school year, as compared to those White students who exhibit more positive implicit racial attitudes (Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2003).

Tetlock and Mitchell (2009), among others, have questioned whether laboratory and field demonstrations such as these speak to the existence of implicit bias "in the real world." In response, Jost, Rudman, and colleagues (2009) identified and summarized the results of 10 studies that employed diverse (including several nonstudent) samples and/or measured behavioral outcomes with clear and significant consequences for societal and organizational functioning. For example, a study by Rooth (2007) revealed that professional recruiters in Sweden who received equally qualified resumes from job applicants possessing either Swedish or Arabic last names were 3.3 times more likely to offer interviews to those applicants with Swedish names. On average, these recruiters exhibited strong implicit, but not explicit, stereotypes associating Swedish men with "high productivity" (and Arab Muslim men with "low productivity"). Moreover, recruiters' implicit bias scores predicted the likelihood that they would make discriminatory judgments. The more recruiters exhibited implicit stereotypes, the less likely they were to interview a candidate with an Arab-sounding name. Approximately half of the statistical variability in callback rates resulting from ethnicity could be accounted for by implicit bias.

Rudman and Ashmore (2007) found that White student-participants who scored higher on various measures of implicit bias against racial and ethnic outgroups were significantly more likely to report engaging in verbal slurs, social exclusion, and acts of physical harm against members of minority groups and their property, even after statistically adjusting for their explicit racial attitudes. Those who exhibited greater implicit bias were also more likely to recommend cutting university funding for Jewish, Asian, and Black (vs. other) student associations to resolve a budgetary shortfall. Other studies reveal that significant proportions of police officers, judges, and medical professionals exhibit implicit racial biases that affect their professional judgment,

especially under circumstances of ambiguity and time pressure (e.g., Correll, Park, Judd, Wittenbrink, Sadler, & Keesee, 2007; Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004; Green, Carney, Pallin, Ngo, Raymond, Iezzoni, & Banaji, 2007; Plant & Peruche, 2005; Rachlinski, Johnson, Wistrich, & Guthrie, 2009; von Hippel, Brener, & von Hippel, 2008).

Implicit processes in voting behavior. Even these behaviors, however, might seem too distant from what goes on in the voting booth to answer questions about implicit bias in the age of Obama. Months of media coverage, debates, political advertisements, and direct campaign outreach activities all shape voters' perceptions and evaluations of candidates. Research suggests that even behaviors that are as consequential as voting are affected by seemingly irrelevant factors. For example, Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, and Hall (2005) showed pictures of pairs of candidates for United States congressional seats to people who were unfamiliar with the candidates. These naïve viewers made quick judgments of the candidates' competence levels, and these judgments were remarkably concordant with the election results. Specifically, candidates who were perceived as more competent by naïve judges won 71.6% of the Senate and 66.8% of the House of Representative races. These data suggest, among other things, that voting decisions are not merely the product of conscious and deliberative reflection.

More direct investigations establish the relationship between implicit attitudes and voting behavior (e.g., see Roccato & Zogmaister, 2010). For example, implicit attitudes predicted self-reported voting behavior in the 2002 German parliamentary election, even after adjusting for participants' self-reported attitudes toward the political parties (Friese, Bluemke, & Wänke, 2007). In another study, implicit candidate preferences predicted eventual voting patterns in a local Italian election for both decided and undecided voters (Arcuri, Castelli, Galdi, Zogmaister, & Amadori, 2008). Galdi, Arcuri, and Gawronski (2008) found that for undecided voters, implicit attitudes predicted citizens' (future) voting behavior *better* than explicit attitudes with regard to an important matter of public policy (expansion of an American military base in Vicenza, Italy). (Among decided voters, explicit attitudes were better predictors than implicit attitudes of voting behavior.)

Findings such as these led Wilson and Bar-Anan (2008) to suggest that so-called "undecided" voters "may have already made up their minds at an implicit level" (p. 1047). Although the precise mechanisms by which implicit social psychological processes influence voting behaviors have not yet been identified, it seems likely that implicit attitudes and stereotypes affect the ways in which political information obtained from the media and elsewhere is processed and interpreted. Similarly, media coverage (e.g., of political scandals) has the capacity to influence implicit (as well as explicit) attitudes. To the

extent that incoming information both affects and is affected by one's implicit beliefs, assumptions, and motivations, one would expect that (over time) the relationship between implicit and explicit attitudes (and, ultimately, their relationship to voting behaviors) would be strengthened, especially for those who are interested in politics (e.g., *see* Nosek, 2005).

Implicit bias and Obama's election. The studies of implicit preferences among initially undecided voters—taken in conjunction with the vast literature demonstrating that implicit group preferences predict behavioral outcomes, such as quality of treatment of ingroup and outgroup members (Greenwald et al., 2009; Jost, Rudman et al., 2009)—make a reasonably strong *prima facie* case that implicit attitudes (i.e., racial bias) played some role in the 2008 election. However, this possibility was roundly dismissed by Philip Tetlock, who was quoted in Tierney's (2008) *New York Times* article as claiming:

> Obama's candidacy is in itself a major embarrassment for the unconscious-bias crowd. . . [P]eople did not seize on these [non-racial] rationales in anywhere near the numbers they should have if unconscious bias were as pervasive and potent as typically implied.

This is a sweeping conclusion that fails to withstand critical scrutiny, as we show in this chapter.

For one thing, the election outcome shows that political liberals and some moderates were willing to send a Black man to the White House, but it says nothing at all about the willingness of conservatives to do so (cf. Jost, West, & Gosling, 2009). In fact, the outcome itself does not even establish that liberals are unbiased; it might suggest instead that they were simply successful in *controlling* implicit bias (e.g., Glaser & Knowles, 2008). Still, the evidence remains that conservatives are significantly more racially biased than liberals when it comes to implicit attitudes (e.g., Greenwald, Smith, Sriram, Bar-Anan, & Nosek, 2009; Jost et al., 2004; Nosek et al., 2009; Schmidt & Nosek, 2010).

Of course, race was but one of many factors that differentiated Obama from his opponents in the Democratic primary and general election. The real question, as we noted above, is what the outcome would have been if Obama's White doppelgänger had headed the Democratic (or, more to the point, Republican) ticket. Unless and until we know the answer to questions such as these, we can only conclude that Obama's racial background was not a substantial *enough* negative factor to overcome all of the other factors (including Bush fatigue) that led voters to support him. Purely as a matter of logic, it is fallacious to conclude, as some have, that the election of Barack Obama in 2008 in and of itself signifies that racial bias—whether implicit or explicit— exerted little or no influence during the campaign or that it plays no appreciable

role in society at large. As we shall see, the evidence shows clearly that racial bias affected perceptions and evaluations of Obama.

Explicit racial bias and support for Obama. Several studies have explored the influence of explicit (i.e., self-reported) racial bias on voting in the 2008 election. For example, a survey of 781 Americans in October 2008 revealed, unsurprisingly, that more negative attitudes about Blacks were associated with less favorable evaluations of Obama (Dwyer, Stevens, Sullivan, & Allen, 2009). The authors concluded that racism, but not sexism, affected voting behavior in 2008. Piston (in press) found that participants in the 2008 American National Election Studies (ANES) who believed that Blacks are lazier or less intelligent than Whites also rated Obama less favorably. By contrast, the endorsement of racial stereotypes was unrelated to the degree of support for Hillary Clinton (Obama's main competitor in the Democratic primary) or Joseph Biden (Obama's vice presidential nominee). Mas and Moretti (2009) found no evidence that Obama was more likely to underperform (relative to White Democratic candidates) in racially intolerant (vs. tolerant) electoral districts, but they cautioned that their conclusions were "not definitive, in particular because [they did] not have microdata on race attitudes and on how people actually voted in the 2008 election" (pp. 328–329).[5]

Implicit racial bias and support for Obama. There are at least three published articles that answer Mas and Moretti's (2009) call for individual-level "microdata" and, in so doing, directly adddress the provocative claim that the United States has entered a "post-racial" phase with the election of Barack Obama. As it happens, these articles also address the skeptical claim that implicit attitudes fail to predict meaningful or consequential forms of social behavior (e.g., Tetlock & Mitchell, 2009), insofar as one assumes that voting behavior is meaningful and consequential. Importantly, the studies reported in these three articles made use of very different measures of implicit and explicit racial attitudes (Greenwald, Smith et al., 2009; Knowles, Lowery, & Schaumberg, 2009; Payne et al., 2010), but they arrived at the same conclusion: *People with more negative implicit and explicit anti-Black attitudes were indeed less likely to vote for Obama.*

Greenwald, Smith, and their colleagues (2009) assessed the implicit and explicit attitudes of approximately 1,000 visitors to a public website in the week prior to the 2008 election. Participants completed a brief version of the IAT and another well-validated implicit measure, the Affect Misattribution Procedure (AMP; Payne, Cheng, Covorun, & Stewart, 2005). They also reported their explicit attitudes (i.e., feelings of warmth) toward Black and White people, their degree of explicit preference for Blacks vs. Whites, and their voting intentions. Finally, participants completed a 4-item explicit measure of modern or symbolic racism (Sears & Henry, 2005). The researchers

found that political conservatism was significantly correlated with implicit and explicit measures of pro-White/anti-Black racial preferences, replicating and extending previous research (e.g., Jost et al., 2004; Nosek et al., 2009; Reyna et al., 2006; Sears et al., 2004; Sidanius et al., 1996). Nevertheless, even after statistically adjusting for political orientation, Greenwald and colleagues observed that implicit and explicit racial preferences contributed independently and significantly to voting intentions; as expected, people who exhibited more negative implicit and explicit racial attitudes were less likely to support Obama.

Payne, Krosnick, and their colleagues (2010) conducted three studies involving nationally representative probability samples of the United States population (ranging in size from 1056 to 1933). Participants completed the AMP as well as various explicit measures of racial bias between the end of August 2008 and the day preceding the election. After the election, participants indicated whom they had voted for. As in the Greenwald et al. (2009) study, people who scored higher in explicit racial bias were more likely to have voted for McCain and less likely to have voted for Obama, even after adjusting for political orientation and, in this case, a host of other demographic variables. Implicit attitudes also predicted voting behavior (as well as expressed feelings of discomfort with a Black president), and these effects were statistically mediated by explicit attitudes in all three samples. That is, greater implicit negativity toward Blacks was associated with greater explicit prejudice, which, in turn, was associated with an increased tendency to vote for McCain, a decreased tendency to vote for Obama, and an increase in self-reported discomfort with having a Black president. Even after adjusting for levels of explicit prejudice, implicit prejudice predicted a reluctance to vote for Obama (and discomfort in response to a Black president), although it did not predict an increased willingness to vote for McCain. Based on these findings, Payne and his colleagues concluded, "Mr. Obama was not elected because of an absence of prejudice, but despite its continuing presence" (p. 373).

Knowles, Lowery, and Schaumberg (2009) conducted a study in which implicit bias was assessed using the Go/No-go Association Test (GNAT; Nosek & Banaji, 2001), which provides an index of attitudes toward a single group rather than relative preferences, as measured by the IAT. They found that individuals who exhibited greater implicit racial bias in late October 2008 were less likely to report (after the election) that they had voted for Obama. The effect of implicit bias was considerable: An increase of 1 standard deviation in implicit bias from the mean (i.e., moving from the 50th to the 66th percentile) was associated with a 42.5% drop in likelihood of voting for Obama. Furthermore, Knowles et al. demonstrated that implicit bias scores

predicted opposition to a health-care plan when it was represented as Obama's plan but not when it was represented as Bill Clinton's plan. These findings suggest that implicit bias not only played some role in the 2008 election but also that it has likely influenced the first year or more of Obama's presidency.

Taken in conjunction, the five studies reported in these three articles included data based on well over 5,000 participants and were conducted by scientists working in independent laboratories and employing diverse means of estimating implicit and explicit bias. These methodological differences across studies render their empirical convergence all the more striking. The studies show quite conclusively that both implicit and explicit forms of racial bias predicted voting intentions to a statistically significant extent in the 2008 presidential election. It seems premature, then, to celebrate the nation's graduation to the status of a "post-racial" society. Rather, the available evidence—especially from the study by Knowles et al. (2009)—is more consistent with the notorious observation made by former President Jimmy Carter early in the Obama presidency: "I think an overwhelming portion of the intensely demonstrated animosity toward President Barack Obama is based on the fact that he is a black man" (Blow, 2009).

Research conducted by Caruso, Mead, and Balcetis (2009) suggests that political ideology and racial bias can affect fairly basic perceptual processes as well as behavioral outcomes such as voting. In a pair of studies conducted prior to the 2008 election, participants were asked to indicate which of several photographs of Barack Obama were most representative of him and captured his "true essence." Unbeknownst to the participants, Obama's skin tone had been digitally altered to appear lighter or darker in some of the photographs. In both studies, political conservatives were more likely than liberals to believe that the darkened photos were more representative of Obama, whereas liberals were more likely than conservatives to believe that the lightened photos were more representative. (Among conservatives [but not liberals], anti-Black IAT scores were significantly correlated with the tendency to see the darkened photographs as more representative.) Furthermore, even after adjusting for the significant effects of political orientation, participants who judged the darkened (vs. lightened) photos to be more representative were far less likely to support Obama.

CONSEQUENCES OF OBAMA'S ELECTION

Quite independent of the question of whether Obama's election in and of itself signifies that racial prejudice in the United States became purely vestigial in November 2008 is the question of how his election will affect racial attitudes

going forward. Kaiser et al. (2009) have staked out a pessimistic position, arguing that "Obama's election could produce ironic consequences in the form of decreased support for policies aimed at mitigating racial injustice" (p. 556). Consistent with this general notion, Kaiser and colleagues found that, compared to college students just prior to Obama's election, students sampled right after the election were more likely to endorse the *system-justifying* beliefs that hard work is always rewarded in our society, that we have made great strides in terms of racial progress, and that there is less of a need for additional racial progress. Post-election respondents also reported less willingness to support programs designed to reduce racial inequality, such as affirmative action, school desegregation, and attempts to ensure equal access to health care across ethnic groups.

This work suggests that some people may have seen the election as reflecting *all* Americans' racial attitudes and concluded that if the country elected a Black president, it must not be as prejudiced as they had previously assumed. Indeed, this is how Tetlock (2008), Tierney (2008), and many others seem to have interpreted Obama's election. The 2008 election also may have assuaged some individuals' concerns that they themselves were biased. The mere act of voting for Obama may have offered a kind of dispensation of prejudice that diminished concern among Obama supporters about acting in a discriminatory fashion. Research on *moral credentialing* suggests that after people express condemnation of prejudice and discrimination—and therefore establish their egalitarian qualifications—they tend to exhibit more bias (Monin & Miller, 2001). In three studies conducted prior to the 2008 election by Effron, Cameron, and Monin (2009), one group of Obama supporters was given the chance to convey their voting intentions, whereas another equivalent (control) group either made no such report (Study 1) or indicated which candidate they supported in the 2004 presidential election (Studies 2 and 3). After declaring their support for Obama, participants were more likely to favor a White over a Black applicant for a job on a police force that was described as having racial tensions. Participants were also more likely to recommend allocating funds to a community organization that served a mostly White (vs. Black) population. That is, publicly expressing one's support for Obama appeared to ease any potential concerns about being or appearing prejudiced, thereby triggering increases in racially biased judgments. Not all studies, however, paint such a bleak picture of the consequences of Obama's election.

Consequences of Obama's election for implicit racial bias. The social psychological literature suggests that positive role models can attenuate implicit bias. For example, exposure to admirable Black Americans (and contemptible White Americans) reduces implicit anti-Black negativity both immediately and even 24 hours later (Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001). Dasgupta and

Asgari (2004) found, furthermore, that although women enrolled in co-educational and all-female colleges started with similar implicit stereotypes associating "male" with "leader," this stereotypical association was eliminated after 1 year for women studying in the single-sex college, but it grew stronger for women at the co-educational college. It appears that greater exposure to female professors at the single-sex school caused the reduction in bias.

President Obama and his wife, Michelle, have been referred to as "role model[s]-in-chief" (e.g., Bellantoni, 2009; Jamieson, 2009). Consistent with this designation, Plant et al. (2009) reported a serendipitous finding—namely, that research participants in fall, 2008 were not showing the (generally robust) implicit preference for Whites over Blacks. The researchers conducted additional studies to explore the possibility that this sudden disappearance of racial bias resulted from Obama's influence. They observed that the ease with which positive Black exemplars came to mind attenuated implicit bias. Specifically, participants listed the first 5 thoughts that came to their minds or were likely to come to others' minds about Black people. People who spontaneously generated the name of a celebrated Black individual (i.e., listed one such person in the "top 5" on either list) exhibited less implicit bias than did those whose lists included no such exemplars. Additionally, the stronger a given individual's association between the concepts "Black people" and "government," the less likely he or she was to exhibit implicit racial bias.

Findings such as these suggest that it is plausible that repeated exposure to President Obama could mitigate the otherwise pervasive display of implicit racial preference, at least for some citizens. However, as noted above, Schmidt and Nosek (2010) observed stable, moderate levels of implicit racial bias (on average) before, during, and even after Obama's election. Still, the possibility that positive role models can at least temporarily reduce implicit bias should not be discarded, given previous evidence (e.g., Blair, 2001; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006).

Is there an "Obama effect" on stereotype threat? Thus far, we have focused on what social psychologists call *perceiver effects*—that is, attitudes and beliefs *about* African-Americans held by voters and other members of society. But racial inequality also leaves psychological marks on African-Americans themselves (i.e., "target effects"). For example, negative cultural stereotypes about one's group can create *stereotype threat*—that is, a performance decrement presumably caused by a fear of confirming those stereotypes (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Such impairments can occur even when individuals explicitly reject the stereotypes. For example, compared to White students, Black students underperform on academic tests (adjusting for prior academic performance) when race is made salient (Steele & Aronson, 1995) or the test is described as diagnostic of innate ability (Brown & Day, 2006; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

By contrast, students from both groups perform equally well when the tests are administered in a race-neutral situation or described simply as puzzles rather than tests.

Because of Obama's intellectual capacities and accomplishments, as well as prior work showing that positive role models attenuate stereotype threat effects (e.g., Blanton, Crocker, & Miller, 2000; Marx & Roman, 2002; Marx, Stapel, & Muller, 2005), researchers have considered whether exposure to Obama might diminish the occurrence of stereotype threat among Black Americans. Marx, Ko, and Friendman (2009) found some support for this hypothesis using a quasi-experimental design. After adjusting for participants' education levels, White test-takers outperformed Black test-takers during periods in which Obama's success was somewhat low in salience (e.g., a week before Obama was officially nominated at the Democratic convention and halfway between the convention and the election itself). However, Black and White participants performed equally well immediately following the election, when thoughts about Obama were likely very high in salience.

In a more direct test, Aronson, Jannone, McGlone, and Johnson-Campbell (2009) randomly assigned Black and White students during the summer of 2008 to think about the positive qualities of Obama, McCain, or an unnamed political candidate (and a fourth group did not think about political figures at all). Unfortunately, thinking about Obama failed to diminish the disparity in academic performance between White and Black students. Although the elimination of stereotype threat in the Marx et al. (2009) study generates some basis for optimism, the more carefully controlled experiment by Aronson et al. (2009), especially when taken in conjunction with the findings of Schmidt and Nosek (2010) from the very large sample at the Project Implicit website, indicates that Obama's election has not yet managed to counteract the long-standing effects of culturally entrenched stereotypes and biases (e.g., *see also* Allport, 1954/1979; Jost & Hamilton, 2005). In retrospect at least, it was probably unrealistic to expect that it could.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, we have sought to distill and describe the most relevant insights from social psychological research concerning the significance of Barack Obama's extraordinary election to the presidency of the United States. Specifically, we have brought data to bear on the most optimistic remarks about the disappearance of racial prejudice in the nation. Unfortunately, the results indicate that Obama's election does not in itself signify that the United States has entered a truly "post-racial" phase of historical development. Nor has sending a Black man to the White House proven to be a racial panacea

when it comes to implicit bias and stereotype threat. However, there are glimmers of hope, as detected in several independent studies. None of this, we suspect, would surprise the President himself. After all, he declared in March, 2008, "Contrary to the claims of some of my critics, black and white, I have never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy—particularly a candidacy as imperfect as my own." At the same time, it is somehow fitting to end this chapter, at least for now, on the more hopeful words that Obama chose to follow this sober admission: "I have asserted a firm conviction . . . that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union."

NOTES

1 We thank Jeff Ebert, Erin Hennes, Anesu Mandisodza, Artur Nilsson, Andrew Shipley, Jojanneke van der Toorn, and Ian Weiss for extremely helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

2 The reader might also recall the concerns of some conservative pundits and strategists regarding a potential *pro*-Black racial bias among liberal and minority voters. Although we acknowledge these claims, we do not address them in this chapter, because the "post-racial" perspective (Steele, 2008; *see also* Crowley, 2008; Tierney, 2008) has focused on the presence vs. absence of anti-Black (rather than pro-Black) bias. Moreover, data on voter turnout as a function of demographic group membership are best interpreted by political scientists; we focus here on the ways in which *social psychological* research on racial attitudes may inform our understanding of Obama's presidency and its impact.

3 Of course, a White doppelgänger would not actually be "otherwise identical" to Obama, because of cultural and other factors (e.g., differential treatment of Black and White children, etc.). The thought experiment is raised in part to illustrate the impossibility of truly knowing the role that race played in the 2008 presidential election.

4 These implicit preferences for advantaged over disadvantaged groups are consistently stronger among political conservatives than liberals or moderates (e.g., Greenwald, Smith, Sriram, Bar-Anan, & Nosek, 2009; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Nosek et al., 2009; Schmidt & Nosek, 2010).

5 The use of a single item to measure racial attitudes is also potentially problematic, especially given that it tapped support for vs. opposition to an outdated and unconstitutional policy—namely, the prohibition of inter-racial marriage.

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