

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the rhetorical strategies used by Reverend Jesse L. Jackson from the 1970's to the 1990's. Specifically, this study examines Jackson's use of narrative to empower himself, his constituency, and his political ideologies without possessing a traditional political platform. Jackson raised political and social consciousness regarding the positions he held by telling persuasive, strategically constructed narratives. By examining Jackson's narrated approach to politics, arguments can be constructed to demonstrate how Jackson rhetorically operates from an unorthodox platform in the political arena. A functionalist view of narrative, as defined by Lucaites and Condit (1985), is applied to Jackson's 1984, 1988, and 1992 Democratic National Convention addresses in order to account for "tangible" objectives being carried out by the

narrative discourse form. In doing so, the study argues that Jackson's narratives initially functioned: to empower Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition; to bolster public approval ratings of Jackson from 30% to 54%; and later to promote Statehood for Washington D.C.

Reverend Jesse Jackson's Rhetorical Strategy: A Case  
for the Functional Role of Narratio

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Reverend Jesse Jackson's Rhetorical Strategy: A Case for  
the Functional Role of Narratio

Chapter 1.  
Introduction

"On a small Southern college campus, I once observed a lesson never to be forgotten. I saw a dwarf and a giant walking together--they were an odd couple. He was six feet three, she was three feet tall. When they reached the parting paths, they embraced. He handed her her books and she skipped down the path. It looked to be romantic. I asked the [college] president--what is this I'm seeing? He said, I thought you would ask. You see, that is his sister, in fact his twin sister. By a twist of fate he came out a giant, she a dwarf. All of the big schools offered him athletic scholarships. The pros offered him money. But he said I can only go where my sister can go. Somewhere that man learned ethics, caring for others."

Reverend Jesse Jackson

Narrated accounts of human experience appear to be the long standing means for sharing the trials and tribulations of life. Prior to the formulation of oral cultures, graphic renderings of gods, great hunts, and battles were painted on cave walls as symbolic depictions representing the history, values, and communicative form that empowered individuals to take a single interpretation of events and share those ideas with many. In the oral tradition, Peninnah Schram claims that people celebrate their sensory and mental memories by telling stories.<sup>1</sup> Pamela Cook Miller notes in her article "Listen to the Ancients," that the oral tradition in western civilization has relied on



narratives that "fulfill educational, social, religious, as well as aesthetic functions."<sup>2</sup> Writer Ursula Le Guin claims that "in the telling, we are all one blood."<sup>3</sup> Le Guin suggests that the audience becomes one with the narrator, mentally and emotionally partaking in the meaning and unfolding of events. People appear to be captivated by the power of a good story.

Many American political figures have relied on the potential potency narratives possess in their attempts to gain audience adherence for votes, policies, and power. William F. Lewis noted how Ronald Reagan relied on the narrative form to "direct his policies, ground his explanations, and inspire his audiences."<sup>4</sup> Like Reagan and numerous other politicians, Reverend Jesse L. Jackson has utilized a rhetorical discourse that is based in the narrative form: Jackson is a storyteller and accounting for Jackson's use of narrative appears to be particularly interesting considering Jackson's political status.

Jesse Jackson ascended the ladder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) with the aid of Dr. Martin Luther King, to later head up Operation Breadbasket and Operation PUSH in Chicago. Arguably, Jackson climaxed with a challenge for the presidency in 1984 and again in 1988 to be currently recognized as the president and architect of the Rainbow Coalition. Though these offices are socially commendable, Jackson has yet to hold an elected office in the political arena.

This lack of official legitimization would seem to create power as well as logistic problems for Jackson. Initially, regardless of lacking any "official" status or platform, Jackson controlled enough power to free hostages from Iraq, negotiate Camp David accords, and meet with heads of state while acting as a self-appointed foreign relations ambassador serving U.S. interests. A situation then exists where Jackson and his rhetoric are unique in so much as Jackson has been able to rhetorically empower himself and his ideologies from a position of "political powerlessness."

#### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to investigate the rhetorical strategies used by Jesse Jackson from the 1970's to the 1990's. Specifically, this study examines Jackson's use of narrative to empower himself, his constituency, and his political ideologies without possessing a traditional political platform. Jackson has raised political and social consciousness regarding the positions he has held by telling persuasive, strategically constructed narratives. Jackson's narratives may be viewed as the means through which his ideologies are embodied and his messages are clarified. By examining Jackson's narrated approach to politics, arguments can be constructed to demonstrate how Jackson rhetorically operates from an unorthodox platform in the political arena.

A functionalist view of narrative will be applied to Jackson's discourse in order to account for "tangible" objectives being accomplished by Jackson's storytelling; Jackson's narratives serve an identifiable purpose. This functional approach to narrative will be addressed as the method for illuminating Jackson's rhetoric at the end of this chapter. Jackson's narrative style will be identified and defined as the culmination of shared life experiences in which reality is co-created between rhetor and audience. This study will also attempt to justify Neo-European means of criticism being applied to African American rhetoric. A myriad of new research has centered around raising critical consciousness regarding Neo-European standards of criticism being laminated to African American discourse, whereby false assumptions are argued to foster due to cultural diversity.

This exploration in narrative will be chronologically limited to Jackson's orations starting with his 1974 "Save the Worker" speech delivered in Philadelphia's John F. Kennedy Square; his "Young America, Dream" speech delivered to the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, California, July 17, 1984; his "Common Ground and Common Sense" speech delivered at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, Georgia, on July 20, 1988; and his address on "The Moral Center" delivered before the Democratic National Convention, New York, New York, July 14, 1992.

In the course of tracking Jackson's narrative style, changes will be noted as Jackson's style shifts from radical enterprises to a "mainstream," large scale narrated approach to politics. In doing so, this study argues that Jackson's narratives initially functioned: to empower Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition; to bolster public approval ratings of Jackson from 30% to 54%; and later to promote Statehood for Washington D.C. While Jackson did not accomplish his goal for the presidency in 1984 and 1988, he did gain global recognition, respect, and bargaining power.

Finally, this study hopes to make contributions of social, academic, and pedagogical significance. By critically analyzing Jesse Jackson's political discourse, this body of research takes on both rhetorical and historical significance to account for where Jackson stands in American politics and how he acquires and maintains power. At the same time, this study intends to increase understanding of African American rhetoric by utilizing Jackson as a part for the whole, whereby larger conclusions may be drawn from Jackson about the ways in which traditional Black oratory relies on narrated meaning. In doing so, a narrative function will be practically applied to Jackson's discourse and evaluated as method in order to determine feasibility while developing our knowledge of rhetorical criticism. Hopefully, this endeavor will expand on the functional role of *narratio*, thus contributing to

rhetorical theory. Ultimately, by increasing our understanding of all human communication, this work will entice future analysis of African American oration so that we might enhance our understanding and tolerance of each other.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The first part of the literature review will address concerns about Neo-European means of criticism being applied to African American discourse, followed by research on Jesse Jackson. The second part of the review will explore literature focused on contemporary examinations of narration in the context of political and social settings; specific attention will be paid to varying functional approaches. The third and final part will consist of a statement of method for analyzing Jackson's rhetoric.

### **Part I: Literature Review on Jesse Jackson**

When analyzing a rhetorical act or specific African American rhetor, Charles L. Prysby argues that critics should not apply Neo-European standards of evaluation.<sup>5</sup> In Prysby's study titled "Attitudes of Southern Democratic Party Activists Toward Jesse Jackson: The Effects of the Local Context," he claims critics should be sensitive and aware of utilizing the means of critical evaluation established by the predominant white culture and laminating

them to the different communication styles of African Americans. The argument here is that false conclusions will be drawn from improper critical applications produced by a lack of cultural awareness.

Hecht, Ribeau, and Alberts justify Neo-European criticism by claiming that African American culture has influenced our "common culture" with music, dance, sports, literature--virtually all aspects of the American lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> In Crafting Equality, Lucaites and Condit claim that as African Americans have forwarded the etymology of many American words, they have helped construct our national heritage.<sup>7</sup> Lucaites and Condit further deny the claim that America's public values are necessarily "white."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, as Jesse Jackson has challenged the presidency and in doing so attempted to acquire votes from all ethnic groups, a critical examination by any one group or individual seems justified.

Jannette Lake Dates and Oscar H. Gandy, Jr. (1985) probed the ways in which ideological constraints affected coverage of Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign. They reiterate the commonly acknowledged belief that publishers, editors, and writers are the gatekeepers of popular opinion and political ideology. Jackson forwarded the first real challenge for the presidential nomination which, for the first time, was taken seriously by white America. The presence of a Black candidate challenged both the two party system and created a significant challenge for the media.<sup>9</sup>

The media had been sensitized by persistent complaints of discrimination against minorities (a point of contention that Jackson raised frequently to ward off blatant attacks) which lent themselves to superficial criticism of Jackson's rhetoric rather than substantive evaluation of his policy positions. Jackson supporters argue that the media too often focused on his eloquence which hindered his credibility on the issues. Dates and Gandy claim that Jackson was treated differently by the media because of his race and because of the fact he had no real chance of winning the nomination. The color of Jackson's skin generated contradicting means of criticism. Both the liberal and conservative press were walking the fence between standard ideology and racial sensitivity.

In order to uncover ideological differences, Dates and Gandy applied a method of assertion analysis developed by Gerbner. This method engages in content analysis of media coverage that compared the "differential tendencies in representations of the same event by different news sources."<sup>10</sup> Dates and Gandy deduced that the media-set agenda produced differential emphasis of Jackson's character and the issues he backed. Jackson was not portrayed like other candidates due to a deviation from standard ideology to racial sensitivity.

Lesley A. Di Mare (1987) has also critiqued Jackson's 1984 campaign rhetoric by illuminating the manner in which conflict can be functionalized. Her purpose was to explain

how Jackson functionalized conflict to his benefit at the 1984 Democratic National Convention. Conflict resolution scholars traditionally think in terms of eliminating or reducing conflict. Di Mare approaches conflict in terms of how it might function to Jackson's benefit. Due to the diversified interests of competing factions, conflict, and division permeated the 1984 convention. Long standing Black Democrats pledged to leave the party if specific demands were not met. Women were demanding a female running mate on the ticket. Labor unions, Homosexuals, the Hispanic community, and members of the Green Movement staged separate rallies the day before the convention. It appeared that cohesion would not be attainable within the Democrat party. "Perhaps the heaviest burden for resolving this conflict fell on the shoulders of the Reverend Jesse Jackson whose candidacy and platform often inflamed or further divided the party."<sup>11</sup>

Specific tensions also emerged from Jackson's unforgettable slurs against Jews, his support for Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan, and his lack of experience in the political arena. According to Di Mare, Jackson functionalized the varying tension by first acknowledging its existence to the audience. Secondly, he elaborated on the normality of such tension in politics, and thirdly, he emphasized the positive political attributes that arise from differing political views. The rhetorical devices



utilized by Jackson to accomplish these ends were not addressed by Di Mare.

Mark P. Moore has illuminated Jackson's rhetoric at both the 1984 and 1988 Democratic National Conventions. Moore (1992) examined how Jackson's use of mystery and metaphor functioned to re-create social order during Jackson's 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns. Moore argues that subordinate class members can partake in socially symbolic acts that reject the existing hierarchy to construct new social order.<sup>12</sup> As a representative of the subordinate class or community of "have-nots," Jackson "challenged America's view of itself."<sup>13</sup> This view was challenged by exposing the existing myth as corrupt and then constructing a new myth with metaphor. Jackson identified the dominant view of America as "deceptively oppressive" by forwarding "rainbow" and "patch-quilt" metaphors that functioned as an alternative view of reality for members of society that have been traditionally rejected.<sup>14</sup> Jackson emphasized unity in the face of division in his attempt to pull the oppressed up from their oppression.<sup>15</sup> Moore argues that Jackson was able to construct "a world view based on the idea that people are, the 'same-in-their-differences,' with his rainbow and quilt metaphors."<sup>16</sup>

Moore found that in 1984, Jackson was able to symbolically establish "an alternative view of social order by identifying himself first as the leader of people who

constitute the real yet rejected human race, imperfect by nature, but driven by a perfect cause."<sup>17</sup> Jackson's 1988 speech centered around a "solution to division, and a return to unity."<sup>18</sup> Jackson had to overcome the element of division which Moore claims was part of the social mystery. The "quilt" and all its pieces functioned as the "reconstructive metaphor" that had to be bound together to construct social order.

While the metaphors Jackson uses appear to serve the many purposes that Moore addresses, Jackson's metaphors appear to make sense because they are inextricably bound to the narrative form. Jackson's metaphors are components of a larger narrative. The metaphors are plausible because Jackson's stories create the necessary meaning for the metaphors. It appears as if the socially symbolic act of constructing social order is a product of myth and metaphor in narrative. Moore appears to have established a frame for viewing Jackson's narrative style as carrying out the same function as myth and metaphor in the construction of social order.

Patricia Sullivan (1993) has also formulated a case study looking at Jesse Jackson's 1988, "Common Ground and Common Sense" speech. Her study established a theoretical framework for illuminating African American political rhetoric; Jackson is used as a case in point. Obviously, Sullivan views Jackson's discourse worthy of representing African American discourse in general. In her analysis she

identifies tropes that characterize African American patterns of signification. Tropes are operationally defined as "set expressions/call response formulas, "lies"/tall tales, and common sense stories."<sup>19</sup> Sullivan uses The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism (1988), by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. for her methodology. Gates "argues that the folkloric trickster figure or signifying monkey represents the efforts of African-Americans to mediate between demands of the Black world and the white world."<sup>20</sup> The "signifying monkey" narrates meaning in order to mediate between the two worlds. This method may be viewed as one way of avoiding interpretations of African American discourse that are not universally accepted. The impetus for Sullivan's work stemmed from the assumption that white popular and scholarly critics misunderstood Jackson's 1988 Democratic Convention speech. Sullivan deduced that these misunderstandings fallaciously labeled Jackson as overly emotional and dishonest.<sup>21</sup> Sullivan believes that emphasis being placed on the written tradition over the oral has also lent itself to the criticism of Jackson's rhetoric. It has been argued that the oral tradition is an ignorant means of exchanging information in contrast to the superior power of the written word.

It appears that the same circle of critics that defined Jackson as "overly emotional" have also labeled him as the "master of bumper-sticker rhetoric." This label has

risen as a byproduct of Jackson's frequent use of rhythm and repetition. This style is based in "proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall."<sup>22</sup>

Sullivan found that African Americans expect and emphasize an oral performance based on a speaker's skill to "read an audience and adapting and retelling (even revitalizing) a story...."<sup>23</sup> The element of consistency and validity (contradicting the importance of truth in most Neo-European research) is of little significance to the African American audience and is furthermore, not expected. "Narrative originality lodges not in constructing new stories but in managing a particular interaction with this audience at this time-at every telling the story has to be introduced uniquely into a unique situation, for in oral cultures an audience must be brought to respond, often vigorously."<sup>24</sup> But, the critical question is, when does a "unique" story become a lie and how "vigorously" may a rhetor be and still remain within the constraints of any cultures ethical standards? Sullivan would respond that "lying" or exaggerating within the context of the Black oral tradition does not necessarily connote dishonesty or insincerity in the minds of a Black audience.

For the purpose of this study, Sullivan has both emphasized the importance of understanding the Black oral tradition as well as utilizing Jesse Jackson's discourse as

exemplary of the African American style. In her analysis of style, she has emphasized tropes as method for understanding a differing mindset of another culture. By explaining this alternate view of African American rhetoric, Sullivan has acknowledge Jesse Jackson as the teller of stories. What Sullivan views as rhythmic, repetitive, and common sense modes of speech may also be viewed as specific components of the larger narrative.

Furthermore, Sullivan addressed the significance of a consciousness raising facet existing in narrated events. There are psychological levels on which stories function. Sullivan's concern is with "call response formulas" for understanding African American persuasion; these responsive acts work because they generate, on some level, the psychological threads of history and shared life experiences. Rhythm, repetition, and stories are readily recognizable and internalized to create meaning and potential action within the rhetorical audience. Sullivan concludes that critics "must go beyond white standards for communication in order to understand African-American politicians who utilize the patterns of signification," and Jackson may be viewed as a case in point.

Finally, it is important when attempting to comprehend and account for Jackson that the critic be aware of a major shift in thinking among many Black leaders.<sup>25</sup> According to the article "Who Speaks for American Blacks," by Glen C. Loury, many African Americans are deviating from the

traditional power based infrastructure (mainstream political avenues) in order to get their messages across and achieve policy changes. Jesse Jackson may be viewed as reflecting this temporal shift as he has "discovered self-help as a legitimate tool for advancing the condition of the black poor."<sup>26</sup> The notion of self-help advancement may be one means to account for how Jackson has politically empowered himself. African American trend for self-help is based on the internalizing of blame for poor socioeconomic conditions long attributed to racism, combined with placing African American politicians into office; organizing labor unions; empowering and reinforcing family structure; and promoting education.<sup>27</sup>

Whether the case be trying to account for African American means of communication, ideological constraints, functionalizing conflict, constructing new social order, or temporal shifts in African American thinking, a commonality remains between studies; the writers have tried to account for the seemingly endless controversy that follows Reverend Jesse Jackson.

## **Part II: Literature Review on Narratio**

In "Re-constructing Narrative Theory: A Functional Perspective," Lucaites and Condit claim that the critic should be concerned with the interaction of form and function in narrative; by concentrating on the form and

function, the critic is able to explore the role narratives play in the "formation of political and social consciousness."<sup>28</sup> Narrative has the power to shape human consciousness because narrative relies on "metacodes" that "allow for the transcultural transmission of messages about a shared reality." Metacodes can be viewed as long standing story-lines that are almost immediately recognizable by any given audience; the audience would already hold meaning in the metacode that could be instantly attached to the narrative. Furthermore, Lucaites and Condit emphasize the functional role narrative plays in prescribing a call to social action (the narrative evoked response) because narrated discourse can construct perceptions of power.

Lucaites and Condit view *narratio* in the classical sense as it functions to delight (*delectere*), to instruct (*docere*), and to move (*movere*), respectively relating to beauty, truth, and power; from which beauty pertains to the poetic, truth to dialectic, and power to rhetoric.<sup>29</sup> In examining the three primary, ancient modes of discourse--poetic, dialectic, and rhetoric--it has often been noted that, while a particular discourse may address one, two, or all three of these goals, it will typically feature one of them as its primary ends.<sup>30</sup>

Lucaites and Condit contend that rhetoric concerns itself with power-based movement. The rhetorical narrative then creates some level of consciousness within the

rhetorical audience regarding a particular value or thing, which functions to evoke the audience to act in a certain way about that value or thing. In analyzing a specific rhetorical act or narrative, Lucaites and Condit believe that the critic should be concerned with the function the discourse carries out, because "function governs persuasion, not form or content."<sup>31</sup> In other words, rhetorical narrative is a story which serves as an interpretive lens through which the audience is asked to view and understand the propositions of proof before it. The primary goal of rhetorical narrative is to advocate something beyond itself.<sup>32</sup> Rhetorical narratives describe a set of connections that contribute to a problem and ask the audience to "actively participate in the cause of the discourse to bring about the desired transformation."<sup>33</sup> The desired "transformation" is brought about if the narrative stops short "of the formal stage of plot resolution (*italics theirs*) by virtue of its purpose to encourage audience enactment."<sup>34</sup> In other words, narrative functions much like an enthymeme, there exists a process of co-created reasoning or meaning.

On the whole, rhetorical narratives serve the function of enacting interest and "wielding power." The rhetorical narrative must display "brevity, avoid contradictions, demonstrate unities of direction and purpose, and integrate the credibility of narrators, authors, and speakers."<sup>35</sup>



Lucaites and Condit forward a useful tool for the scholar to view narration and the function it carries out in society. However, while illuminating the impact their theory might have on criticism and theory, they do not discuss the benefits to be achieved from internalizing their perspective. In other words, how does narrative function for the speaker? The elements of speaker intent could also be approached to expose and understand the speaker's political agenda.

The functional view held by Lucaites and Condit is a product of a new line of thought introduced by Walter R. Fisher. In his 1984 work entitled "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," Fisher defines narrative as "a theory of symbolic actions--words and/or deeds--that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them."<sup>36</sup> Fisher believes that all human communication is narrated.<sup>37</sup> He further offers a master metaphor to define homosapiens as *Homo Narrans*, believing that "[m]an is in his actions and practices, as well as his fictions, is essentially a storytelling animal."<sup>38</sup>

Fisher believes that there are two separate paradigms of human communication, the rational and narrational. Experts utilize the rational paradigm to conduct or account for specialized fields of argument. Publics need the narrative paradigm to "conduct or account for good moral argument about major decisions of the day."<sup>39</sup> This, in

his view, allows empirical proofs of science to "corrupt" narrated public moral argument. Throughout Fisher's work he emphasizes the complimentary marriage between the political arena and narrative.

Obvious but not acknowledged linkages exist between the work of Lucaites and Condit, and Fisher. Lucaites and Condit suggest the existence of co-created meaning between rhetor and audience that invokes political or social consciousness yet, never actually elaborate on this point. Fisher on the other hand claims the audience are "... active participants in the meaning-formation of the stories."<sup>40</sup> Also, Fisher acknowledges a narrative function but generalizes that function as part of an all encompassing mode of human interaction. Fisher would claim that narratives function as the means for interpreting and assessing all human communication.

Finally, while Fisher has deviated from the classical view of narrative as genre or the second part of speech to identifying a new paradigm, he has also marginalized rhetorical criticism with his buoyant optimism. If all human communication is based in narration, then the unique aspects of narrative become overshadowed. The critic's job is made difficult with regards to describing a particular work and its significance. Yet, this blanket approach can be down-sized and made useful by the critic in ways that a particular speech may be viewed as one large narrative. In contrast to looking at an oration in terms of many facets

(factual data, various forms of proof, etc.), the discourse may be seen as a whole story though not entirely compromised in the narrative form.

Other scholarly work that has responded to Fisher's call also emanates from the functional aspect of narration. Michael Calvin McGee and John S. Nelson in their 1985 work entitled, "Narrative Reason in Public Argument," define narrative as "a story that structures facts according to the expectations of native speakers in a culture."<sup>41</sup> Their definition suggests that stories are dynamic, able to change with the political climate. McGee and Nelson also claim that audiences have certain needs and expectations that must be fulfilled by the narrative. McGee and Nelson partially acknowledge the substance of Fisher's *Homo Narrans* theory. Yet, they prefer a functional view of narrative conceived as "... a moment of argument intrinsic to reason and practiced especially, but not exclusively, in politics."<sup>42</sup> For McGee and Nelson "reason is performed in a moment of revelation," again suggesting the existence of a co-created element produced from the rhetorical interaction.<sup>43</sup> For a narrative to function as a "transforming agent" it must also be compelling to the audience; this is enhanced via the myriad of beliefs already held by the audience.<sup>44</sup>

McGee and Nelson agree with Fisher that narrative fosters moral and political arguments, but argue that it can also enhance technical exchanges amongst experts. They

suggest that constructive conceptions of narrativity can be recreated by treating narrative as the "techne" of translation, similar to the status of the syllogism in scientific method."<sup>45</sup> Like Lucaites and Condit, McGee and Nelson emphasize the critical application and specialization of narrative theory and that "[t]he correspondence between character and fact is the key determinant in narrative believability."<sup>46</sup> While ethical implications are important, they neglect to illuminate the structure of character development. A good plot, exposed heroes and villains etc., might also entice an audience to adhere to the propositions of proof before it, these elements would also appear to compliment truth and character.

The element of truth is further circumscribed by William F. Lewis in "Telling America's Story: Narrative Form and the Reagan Presidency." He claims that narratives "must have some truth, if not historical then true-to-life,"<sup>47</sup> meaning that truth need not be founded in verifiable proof, rather in common life experience.

Lewis believes that narrative theory can provide a powerful account of political discourse and is essential for explaining the Reagan presidency; arguing that Reagan's stories are not just a rhetorical device that Reagan disseminates to embellish his ideas, "Reagan's message is a story."<sup>48</sup> Lewis emphasizes the potency of a short story. Lewis deduced that narrative receives its power from

involvement, whereby the audience become actors in the story, "for they are the means to mythical ends."<sup>49</sup> The analysis found that Reagan used hero stories to direct his policies, ground his explanations, and inspire his audiences.<sup>50</sup> Reagan's narrative power functioned to promote "new faith, direction, and potential glory" which "reinvigorated" the country--further defining what it means to be "American."<sup>51</sup>

While Lewis does value a functional approach, he fails to cover any aspect of how the narrative function is met psychologically through the created meaning within the audience. Nor does he discuss the processing of narrative codes as a symbolic push towards movement and how they might function to evoke action. He does acknowledge the transcendence of a common life history that leaps into the mythic journey to where the audience can assess believability. However, his textual analysis makes a good case for functional application and how narrative might be viewed from a speaker-centered discussion (though he does not use the term "function" or refer to Lucaites and Condit's method).

W. Lance Bennett and Murray Edelman take a very audience-centered approach to their functional exploration of narrative in their 1985 work entitled "Toward a New Political Narrative." They define narrative as "highly selective impressions of reality that seem objective when applied uncritically to ongoing events."<sup>52</sup> The key term

here is "uncritically," which is reflected in their thesis that recurring and stereotyped news stories portray a dynamic world of change while disguising old ideological understandings of and solutions for social truth.<sup>53</sup> In this instance, narrative is seen as capable of hiding as well as disclosing truth.

Bennett and Edelman contend that narratives are appealing because they embody the fears, hopes, and prejudices of the cultures in which their audiences live. They found that narratives function to "create a social world which is accepted depending on the psychological state of mind held by audience members; not the quality of the story."<sup>54</sup> This approach suggests that the most widely accepted narrative of the day might also have the most politically correct or socially correct packaging of the day. In other words, such narratives tell audiences something they already believe, playing on their fears and aspirations, and then take those beliefs to their narrative ends. Furthermore, this view contradicts the majority of works (Lucaites and Condit; McGee and Nelson; Hollihan, 1987; Rowland, 1987, etc.) which emphasize the importance of story structure with regards to audience adherence.

Political narratives may also be used to exclude contradictory information, "leaving the psychological impression one is experiencing reality driven objectivity."<sup>55</sup> Additionally, there exists a popular belief that agreeable political stories are rooted in fact.

Bennett and Edelman extensively elaborate on the psychological appeal narratives possess: 1) narratives accomplish a sense of realism by introducing selective documentation; 2) satisfaction is gained on behalf of the audience by completing fragmentary plot outlines; 3) people draw familiar beliefs and morals from the emerging drama that define meaning and substance in their own lives.

From Bennett and Edelman's work one might conclude that there exists certain archetypal stories that a given culture will share in common. Upon recognizing a particular archetypal narrative, an inferential connection is made which gives meaning and validity to the narrative, be it positive or negative. Bennett and Edelman believe if personal sentiments or interests are reflected in the choice of a "social scene," a positive leap toward action will be made.

Larry David Smith emphasizes structure above all other narrative components in his 1989 work entitled "A Narrative Analysis of Party Platforms: The Democrats and Republicans of 1984," which also highlights the importance of archetypal influence. Smith supports Fisher's idea of "narrative fidelity," believing that the degree to which a story offers a trustworthy guide to action indicates the fidelity of the narrative.<sup>56</sup> In this study, party platforms are critically analyzed as artifacts and products of the larger social institution.<sup>57</sup> The platforms were criticized using Chatman's 1978 structuralist theory of

narrative which emphasizes the content dimension. Smith found that both party platforms utilized narratives to produce plots that are recognizable and embedded in society. In the unfolding of the 1984 convention, Democrats and Republicans create narrative plots where themes are introduced. Both sides expose ideals which they oppose (villains) and those which they value (heros), which function to emphasize party values. Smith suggests that the American body politic compares and contrasts the values conveyed through narrative, and thus cling to those values most salient to their own core beliefs.

Smith acknowledges the functional role of narratives as defined by Lucaites and Condit; concluding that in the convention setting, narratives functioned to construct a working coalition for the Fall that secures the role of the convention and its platform building in the American electoral process.<sup>58</sup> Smith's contribution illuminates the significance of a good plot, that creates elements of believability and truth.<sup>59</sup>

The structuring of narratives has also been considered by two authors who illuminate an artifact outside of the deliberative arena. Yet, their contribution adds to the understanding of narrative theory. Thomas A. Hollihan and Patricia Riley wrote "The Rhetorical Power of a Compelling Story: A Critique of a 'Toughlove' Parental Support Group," (1987) where they focused on "story-lines." Story-lines have beginnings, middles, and ends which describe



individual actions, meanings, provide unity and self definition for the individual.<sup>60</sup>

The components of Hollihan and Riley's self defining narrative are elaborated upon by Lucaites and Condit, who argue that the narratives disseminated by Malcom X and Martin Luther King Jr. drew upon the archetypal fiber of key cultural values in order to generate a sense of community and cohesion among the African American audience.<sup>61</sup> Malcolm's counter-cultural narratives were based on the struggles of his true-life experiences (experiences that mirrored that of many African Americans), while King's narratives were founded in the pre-existing narrative structures of the "American Dream" and "Christian faith."<sup>62</sup> Lucaites and Condit further contend that King's narratives were more effective because he grounded them in the Bible.<sup>63</sup>

Daniel and Smitherman suggest that all Black oratory and communication arises from both sacred and secular Black life.<sup>64</sup> The African American culture is sustained by biblical communication often conveyed via narrative; biblical narratives partially define African American reality.<sup>65</sup> According to Mark Ledbetter, author of Virtuous Intentions: The Religious Dimension of Narrative, narratives serve a religious function, namely, the discovery of virtue.<sup>66</sup> G. Allan Yeomans claims that storytelling has long been an important "weapon in the arsenal of Southern political orators;" African Americans

have been substantially influenced by the narrative form in a religious setting.<sup>67</sup>

Biblical or not, Robert C. Rowland argues that people "love" stories because the plot, character development, and esthetic quality of the language in stories make them more interesting than discursive argument. In 1987 he produced a work entitled "Narrative: Mode of Discourse or Paradigm," where he found the wealth of research on narrative appears to support the conclusion of Lucaites and Condit that narrative represents a universal medium of human consciousness.<sup>68</sup> Rowland attempts to limit the narrative scope of Fisher's all encompassing narrative definition in order to negate the concept of an on going societal narrative. In doing so, he differentiates between arguments based in verifiable information and those that are solely supported by hypothetical, mythical plots as the sole means of persuasion. Rowland further claims that evaluating the effect of narrative is difficult do to the lack of an effect standard.<sup>69</sup> Narratives can be effective, yet false. In addition, a story may be effective, but produce horrendous societal effects (Hitler's mythic narratives for example).

### **Part III: Statement of Method**

The functional role of *narratio*, advanced by Lucaites and Condit, will be utilized in this study as a method for

illuminating Jesse Jackson's rhetoric. After reviewing other contemporary views of narrative, a functional approach to Jackson's use of narrative appears to be conducive to bolstering understanding of Jackson. Of the three ancient modes discussed by Lucaites and Condit, this paper will specifically borrow from the rhetorical narrative that drives toward "power-based movement." Jackson's narratives will be analyzed in the context of both deliberative (political) and epideictic (ceremonial) discourse. This study further purposes to identify the existence of a narrative function by examining how narratives function for Jackson in the formation of political and social consciousness. Furthermore, the functionalist perspective will be expanded by illuminating both the function of many short narratives in a larger oration, combined with identifying how several short narratives function as one large narrative or "master narrative." For example, smaller narratives may be forwarded to back several policies, yet these smaller narratives combine to formulate one narrated message or theme. Finally, for the purpose of this study, narrative will be operationally defined as a culmination of shared life experiences from which reality is co-created between rhetor and audience. Jackson's narratives can then be viewed as the means through which his ideologies are embodied and his messages are clarified.

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## Chapter 2.

### Contextual Ground: The Positions, Platforms, and Criticism of Jesse Jackson

This chapter addresses some of the forces that have shaped Jackson's narrated approach to politics, by introducing the chronological evolution of Jesse Jackson's life history, addressing criticism centered around the validity and reliability of Jackson's storytelling, and demonstrating that Jackson's narrative form has gained the attention of both scholars and journalists. Furthermore, a change in thinking among African Americans and Jackson will be described in order to account for Jackson's rhetorical shift from radical to mainstream discourse. Finally, the political climates of 1984, 1988, and 1992 will be illuminated to establish a back-drop for analyzing Jackson's use of narrative in politics.

Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson was born on October 8, 1941, in Greenville, South Carolina. He graduated from Greenville's Sterling High School in 1959, to later attend the University of Illinois on a football scholarship. Jackson claims he left Illinois after his freshman year due to racial discrimination, transferring to North Carolina A & T where he acquired a B.S. degree in sociology. After graduation, he attended the Chicago Theological Seminary for two years. More than thirty-five colleges and universities have conferred honorary doctoral degrees on



Jackson.<sup>1</sup> His political mission has been ideologically grounded in the human rights movement.

Jackson entered politics with an unannounced jump to the rostrum at a 1963 Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) civil rights demonstration.<sup>2</sup> He earned national recognition in 1967 after being appointed national director of Operation Breadbasket in Chicago by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Jackson formulated Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) in 1971 and mobilized PUSH for Excellence, or EXCEL, in 1975.<sup>3</sup> By 1979, Jackson was beginning to focus less on Chicago politics and more on issues of national significance.

Yet, the validity of Jackson's history varies among sources and inconsistent stories about his personal background have proved to be the catalyst for much of the criticism about him. Andersen (1984); Landess and Quinn (1985); Barnes (1987); Foreman (1988); and Sullivan (1993) have extensively argued that Jackson has creatively colored his past in order to paint a picture complimentary to his political aspirations. Jackson's "tall tales" have raised questions about the credibility of his character and his political intent. Image-based politics is nothing new, yet the magnitude of deception involved in Jackson's media stunts and narrated life history have forced scholars and journalists to look twice at the substance of Jackson's discourse.

Jackson's exaggerated narratives have traveled a course beginning with his telling of an impoverished childhood; tales of racism during his days at the University of Illinois, Champagne/Urbana; and ending with his description of events pertaining to the death of Martin Luther King Jr and Jackson's involvement.

Landess & Quinn (1985), Foreman (1987), Sullivan (1993), and numerous journalists have contrasted the fallacious elements behind Jackson's account of his childhood to those of close friends and even his parents. An often quoted line from Jackson's speeches is "I was born in the slum, but the slum was not born in me."<sup>4</sup> Jackson tells the tale of growing up in Greenville, South Carolina in a "typical Southern dwelling for poor blacks," with coal bins under the front porch and an open toilet on the back porch.<sup>5</sup> He has claimed that his mother was a maid and his father, a janitor.<sup>6</sup> From this challenging past, Jackson has often referred to himself as a "child of the third world."<sup>7</sup> This "third world" child, who grew up in the "occupied zone" (Greenville, South Carolina) has had to negotiate with the superpower, really the "colonial power."<sup>8</sup>

While Jackson was obviously a "child" at one time, his socioeconomic status was anything but "third world." Interviews of his mother and step-father have found that she was a school teacher and he, a long time civil servant with the post office; they were "bewildered" and "hurt" by

Jesse's tales.<sup>9</sup> By white socioeconomic economic standards, the Jackson family lived quite well for the times, generally in a middle class setting.

Jackson has been further accused of bending the truth when narrating his struggle against racism. Throughout Jackson's political history he has deployed "racism" as a major element confronting him in his rhetorical battles. This means of counter attack has proven quite useful in warding off *ad hominem* attacks from people that oppose him (especially journalists); if they opposed his ideas, then they were deemed racist. The following text is a case in point.

During Jackson's years in Chicago with Operation Breadbasket, PUSH Excel, and during the 1984 presidential campaign tour, he would often tell of his repressed football career at the University of Illinois. According to Jackson, he was a highly recruited high school quarterback who sought an education in the racially enlightened state of Illinois, only to find that Blacks were not allowed to call the plays.<sup>10</sup> He was moved to free safety due to his skin color.

From this "racially motivated" experience, Jackson claims to have received his first call to fight racism on every front. However, in this instance, he chose to come back and fight another day as he decided to transfer to North Carolina A&T in 1960 to find racial acceptance.

Jackson's claims against the University of Illinois prompted a sports writer for *The News-Gazette* in Champaign-Urbana to probe into these accusations. This exploration uncovered some startling information. Apparently the starting quarterback at that time was Mel Myers, and he too, was Black.<sup>11</sup> The Iran-Contra Affair it was not, but it was enough to force Loren Tate to check Jackson's transcripts. The documentation showed that Jackson was placed on academic probation for not maintaining grades, which was printed in the local paper.<sup>12</sup> This brought Jackson's classmates forward who claimed he was suspended for plagiarism.<sup>13</sup> Tate proceeded to interview Glenna Cilento who said she typed the paper for Jackson. The student's hearsay and the testimony of Cilento was not verified by the University.

Under fire on the 1984 campaign trail over the Illinois controversy, Jackson claimed these attacks were false and racially motivated.<sup>14</sup> Jackson proclaimed this to be further evidence of racism in Illinois, brought to the surface by a town trying to save face. These types of attacks by Jackson are one of the reasons he was labeled the "Teflon Candidate" by 1984 as both Black and white writers were afraid to critique Jackson as they might a white politician in fear of being labeled a racist or pro-establishment/anti-black.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the most horrendous and widely acknowledged spool of yarn Jackson has spun stems

from his account of the events that happened at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee.

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, and other members of the SCLC were organizing a strike by garbage workers. Before they could retreat for dinner, King was shot dead where he stood on the hotel balcony. Eleven hours after King's death, Jackson "appeared on the *Today Show* wearing the blood-stained turtleneck," recounting King's last words as he "cradled" King's head.<sup>16</sup> Those words, by Jackson's account, relinquished the throne and control of the SCLC over to Jackson.

According to the testimony of many credible, immediate bystanders to the King assassination, Jackson's portrayal of events was far from the truth.<sup>17</sup> While Jackson was on the balcony with King prior to the shooting, only Ralph Abernathy, King's right hand man, and Samuel Kyles were at King's side when the shots rang out; it was Ralph Abernathy who held and comforted King as he passed on.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, without hearing Abernathy testify to King's last wishes regarding the change of leadership, upper staff members already knew and expected the changing of power would result in Abernathy taking charge. This was the next logical step.

Earl Caldwell, a reporter with *The New York Times* said that Jackson was walking the halls telling SCLC staffers to avoid speaking with the press. Jackson felt time was

needed to regroup before releasing any type of official statement. While much of the nation was still horrified with the news of King's death, Jesse Jackson managed to get blood smeared on his turtleneck from where, nobody is certain. By all accounts, Jackson never even entered the hotel room where King's dead body awaited an ambulance.

While only the element of truth has been questioned in Jackson's stories, Jackson's telling of tales has prompted the attention for exploration by scholars and journalists; Jackson has been recognized for his narrative style to politics. Arguably, the very act of questioning Jackson's narrative style could actually function to his benefit as greater attention might be granted to Jackson's future stories. Yet, Jackson is not alone in altering a message or story to dovetail with certain issues and ideologies, similar questions have been raised concerning numerous politicians. However, Jackson has imaginatively justified his tales pertaining to King's death by relying on what he calls the "Peter principle." While Peter the disciple was often absent when Jesus conveyed his Godly direction, Peter was still best suited to interpret Christ's meaning and intentions. Jackson (the symbolic Peter) has creatively constructed narrative justification for his "white lies" in a biblical context; Jackson's actions in turn are founded in the virtues associated with God and the Bible. Still, the attacks on Jackson's self-disclosed history were not as

threatening to him or the movement he represented as was the period that immediately followed King's death.

As the battles in Mississippi and Alabama, the boycotts and sit-ins, the freedom rides and protests died out, so temporarily did the rhetorical and political mission of the freedom movement. Even prior to the death of King, the mission of the movement temporarily receded from issues of national concern to more localized politics. Jackson and King busied themselves with attacking Mayor Richard J. Daley of Chicago in the hopes of increasing minority representation in the local government.<sup>19</sup> Jackson organized mass boycotts against local and national industry that did not employ minorities (specifically African Americans) in an attempt to establish "corporate covenants"(an updated version of Booker T. Washington's Black Capitalism).<sup>20</sup> Jackson made headlines in his attacks on Seven-Up, Burger King, Coca Cola, and other corporations, but produced relatively few jobs.<sup>21</sup> However, this struggle to find a new mission and identity for the movement did not have the despondent impact on movement members as did the death of their leader, Martin Luther King.

After King's death, the movement faltered badly, "principally owing to the reversion of the black left to antiquated forms of orthodox Marxism."<sup>22</sup> Groups like the Black Panthers surfaced wearing black berets with powder-blue turtlenecks, black leather jackets, and black pants

and shoes, forwarding a rhetoric that deviated from the non-violence approach of King. Huey Newton frightened America with statements like: "If we can't walk down the street in security, then you can't walk down the street in security."<sup>23</sup> Panthers like Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, and Black nationalists like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, were among the growing number of "black militants" who were pointing to the increasing density of Blacks in urban centers claiming the "blacks were foolish for trying to gain admittance into the 'mainstream' of American life."<sup>24</sup> Both the Panthers and The Nation of Islam were persuading Blacks to find strength in self-confidence by identifying with Africans and other people of color around the world.<sup>25</sup> The approach of these groups was separatist, anti-white, and anti-establishment. Seale and Newton claimed that Blacks were part of an "oppressed community" that needed to formulate their own community in order to right the wrongs of racist and economic oppression.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, this reversion of Marxist rhetoric further distanced the Black left from the Black community<sup>27</sup> and mainstream America. Arguably, Jackson's rhetoric and political positions temporarily reflected this shift. According to Glen C. Loury, a major shift in thinking existed amongst the Black leaders of the time as they were "openly debating whether black Americans should rely more on their own initiative and efforts in solving



critical problems long attributed to racism."<sup>28</sup> Jackson reflects this temporal shift in both his interpretation of King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and his own "Give the People a Vision" speech.<sup>29</sup> "That so-called 'I Have a Dream' speech was not a speech about dreamers and dreaming, it was a speech describing nightmare conditions."<sup>30</sup> In his presentation of "Give the People a Vision," Jackson calls for a new "self-development crusade."<sup>31</sup> Jackson's rhetoric on the whole during the 1970's displayed a more radical approach to dealing with salient African American issues.

Lacking in focus and purpose, Jackson deployed a more radical discourse that reflected his disillusionment with the freedom movement.<sup>32</sup> In his "Save the Worker" speech, delivered at Philadelphia's John F. Kennedy Square in June of 1974, Jackson urges the crowd to "resist" (by sit-ins and other tactics) job layoffs caused by the nation's "energy hoax."<sup>33</sup> Orating under a banner that read, "Completing the Agenda of Dr. King," Jackson constructs a frame for viewing the actions of the U.S. government in terms of a conspiracy against African American workers. Jackson introduces his discourse by identifying the "traumatic grief" and "pondered meaning" of King's assassination in terms of a highly calculated attempt to "dissolve" and "scatter" the "coalition of progressive forces" that had "won civil rights and abolished the racial insult of segregation."<sup>34</sup> The act (assassination) was a

"designed," "pivotal strategy" for repressing Black America.<sup>35</sup> The "tragic death by political assassination" made followers "bitter, despondent, and cynical," as they "dropped his agenda" in a state of "blind rage."<sup>36</sup> From the King conspiracy, Jackson established the substance for generating linkages to a another conspiracy working against African Americans, the energy crisis "hoax."

Jackson sets up his "hoax" rhetoric by emphasizing new direction based in the "Civil Economics Movement" that is legitimized by the work of PUSH.<sup>37</sup> Jackson then becomes the physical embodiment of task, direction and unity. By connecting the emotions based in the conspiracy of King's death to the same type of conspiratory actions of the U.S. government's energy hoax, Jackson is empowered to gain adherence for his radical rhetoric. The compelling stories of both King's assassination and the changing scene of auto factories, function as the proof for the existence of Jackson's "hoax." Jackson tells the story of his tour through the General Motor's Vega plant in Lordstown, Ohio, where he saw the computerized machines that were displacing workers, predominantly minority workers.<sup>38</sup> The automation process was not affecting white Americans as they were protected by white collar jobs and "grandfather" clause seniority.<sup>39</sup>

While this type of subversive rhetoric seemed to work for some members of the Black community, Jackson's radical discourse only alienated him from "main stream" America.

Jackson ultimately had to come to the realization that if he was going to improve the current state of existence for Blacks and himself, he had to adapt his discourse to a broader audience.

#### CONTEXTUAL GROUND: 1984

By 1984, Jesse Jackson disseminates a more accessible rhetoric that was intended to provide the "common thread" for binding a constituency in a quilt of unity.<sup>40</sup> However, with moving into a broader political light comes the struggle and obstacles of political conflict.

Jackson's first struggle consisted of developing a permanent coalition among the key constituencies that comprised the politically marginalized or democratic Left (often referred to as the nation's "have-nots")<sup>41</sup>:

"Blacks, Hispanics, gay and lesbian organizations, environmentalists, peace and disarmament coalitions, feminists, liberal and anticorporate populists."<sup>42</sup>

Jackson intended to give a voice to the politically muted through a massive African American voter registration drive. Of the 17.6 million Blacks of voting age, only 10.4 million (59.1 per cent) were registered to vote and only 7.6 million (43 per cent) have actually gone to the polls.<sup>43</sup> The belief was that if "Black voter participation [increased] 25% by the time of the general election, Reagan could lose eight states that he won in 1980" (mostly

southern states).<sup>44</sup> Jackson's voter registration drive complimented by his domestic policy based on massive job retraining, improved social and community services, and accelerated public investment through development banks. Jackson's foreign policy was based in promoting economic development among the "Third World" nations by down-sizing military build-up and generating support for the situation in South Africa.<sup>45</sup> Yet, Jackson haphazardly offended both the groups that he was trying to unite and the Democratic party.

Members of the Jewish community were already suspicious of Jackson because of his support of Palestinian causes and his relationship with the inflammatory Black Muslim Leader, Louis Farrakahn.<sup>46</sup> Jewish concerns came to fruition when it was disclosed that Jackson, in a "background" conversation, had called Jews "Hymie" and referred to New York as "Hymietown."<sup>47</sup> Women in general, and members of the National Organization for Women (NOW) specifically, were equally outraged with Jackson when he utilized "bitter words" about the Mondale camp's decision to place a woman on the Democratic ticket--a choice influenced by a "white women" membership.<sup>48</sup> Yet, Jackson was able to influence a supportive base among members of the Black clergy and their congregations who perceived Jackson as the "country preacher."<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, Jackson was continually struggling to outmaneuver the press, whom he accused of ignoring the

issues and distorting his message by concentrating on the "Hymie" remark.<sup>50</sup> Walter Mondale and Gary Hart were accused by Jackson of belittling his campaign, which lead to threats of a convention boycott that were never confirmed or denied by Jackson.<sup>51</sup> The boycott threat lead to concerns over Jackson's fragmenting of Black leadership and his drawing votes away from more liberal white candidates.<sup>52</sup> Thus, it became apparent that the old-line Black leadership (particularly the NAACP and the Urban League) were skeptical about supporting Jackson's platform.<sup>53</sup> The ultimate question raised by Democrats in 1984 then, was what exactly does Jesse want?<sup>54</sup> The criticism coming from civil rights leaders claimed "Jackson was a media performer who [was] short on follow through."<sup>55</sup> Jackson faced the difficult task of trying to close gaps in policy between himself and the portion of the American body politic that he was supposedly representing. The critics argued that if Jackson could not organize his own people, how could he organize a nation? Even members of the Rainbow Coalition claimed Jackson was unorganized and a poor money manager.<sup>56</sup>

Money proved to be another burden for the Jackson camp. "With inadequate funds, virtually no television or newspaper advertisements," the Rainbow Coalition was fighting the financial battle of politics while bucking the Black political establishment.<sup>57</sup> Jackson struggled with the difficult task of trying to gain validity for his

platform, while mending his political mistakes. Yet, while lacking any serious financial backing and meddling in controversy, Jackson was still able to win 19 percent of the primary vote<sup>58</sup>--including 25.5 percent of the vote in New York, 23 percent in New Jersey, 21 percent in Georgia, 20.8 percent in Illinois, 19.4 percent in Alabama, and 17 percent in Pennsylvania.<sup>59</sup> Jackson attracted roughly three out of every four Black ballots cast in the primaries, but only 31% would vote for him in the presidential election, while 53% favored Mondale.<sup>60</sup>

Jackson did not become the first Black president, but he did forward a formidable presidential threat that made people take notice. He gained awareness for the issues of concern for individuals that were historically ignored in political circles. Jesse Jackson made it known in 1984 that he and those he represented were to be taken seriously. Ultimately, Jackson left people pondering what future political role he might serve.

#### **CONTEXTUAL GROUND: 1988**

By 1988, Jackson was being commended by democrats for having the "intestinal fortitude" to speak his mind.<sup>61</sup> This point of praise stemmed from Jackson's ability to distance himself from "funders, managers, the mediators and the consultants who manipulate the party and legitimize its candidates;" this distancing allowed Jackson to say the

unspeakable--about race, class, and equality.<sup>62</sup> Yet, this enlightened view was more likely a by-product of Jackson's broadened representative base and toned-down rhetoric.

Jackson had broadened his global credentials: "He went to Geneva to discuss the arms race and the treatment of Soviet Jews with Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev."<sup>63</sup> Jackson even managed to succeed where the president had failed when he brought back Robert Goodman (captured U.S. flyer) from Syria.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Jackson's domestic policies and voting base were broader and more comprehensive. Jackson went after voters in America's Heartland, squarely in the tradition of Midwestern populism, the New Deal, and the civil rights movement.<sup>65</sup> The administration he wished to construct would redistribute power, turning corporate power into populist power. He wished to transform the bipolar cold war relationships into "new world partnerships."<sup>66</sup> An endorsement for Jackson in 1988 meant an increase in the "minimum wage; measures to end gender pay inequities and reward work on the basis of 'comparable worth'; an attempt to reverse the systematic destruction of family farms ...; and a freeze on the defense budget."<sup>67</sup> These policies were formulated in an attempt to construct a "full-employment society," founded in infrastructure changes to invest in education, housing, transportation, and community services.<sup>68</sup> Jackson had apparently learned from his mistakes on the 1984 campaign trail, and he had the package

to prove it. By March of 1988, of the 23 Congressional Black Caucus members, 19 had already endorsed Jackson.<sup>69</sup>

Still, he had to partially operate under the shadow of the '84 "hymie" remarks, combined with facing new opposition with regards to his lack of officially recognized experience in the political arena.<sup>70</sup> His "front-runner status" was equally undermined with a "not seriously expected to win" label being attached to an African American face.<sup>71</sup> Jackson needed to transcend the issue of race, a problem that no other candidate had to overcome.<sup>72</sup> Members of the Democratic party were concerned that if Jesse ran again, he would make it impossible for any Democrat to be elected president in 1988.<sup>73</sup> Jackson controlled the African American vote that could pull down a Democratic victory; he embodied the brand of liberalism that claimed "America-is-guilty, America-is-racist, business-is-bad, defense-is-a-waste," ideals that the Democrats did not want to be associated with.<sup>74</sup>

Yet, a large percentage of American voters did want to support Jackson. Jackson spoke to a sea of white faces in Memphis, Tennessee, the audience consisted of "Tattoo-wearing, beer-drinking, Southern good ol' boys"; this group would have cursed his name five years prior, but in 1988 they were pushing their way to the front to shake his hand.<sup>75</sup> The domestic policy of his 1988 campaign focused more on economics, especially the economic oppression of all people, and less on race.<sup>76</sup> Though Jackson again lost



the presidential nomination, he once again rallied the Black vote, increased his notoriety, and swayed opposition; he engineered a progressive political force capable of bargaining for power.

#### CONTEXTUAL GROUND: 1992

By 1992, Jackson appeared frustrated with the whole political system and the rate of advancement for African Americans--his presidential aspirations appeared shattered, and it showed in his tone and positions. From the onset of the 1992 campaign trail, Jackson was maintaining a stance of opposition against his fellow Democrats.<sup>77</sup> A major premise that Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition operated from was its power to withhold as well as confer support. However, Jackson's "relentless deference to centrist Democrats made any role for the coalition impossible other than as vehicle for his own political ambitions."<sup>78</sup> Bill Clinton and Jesse Jackson were entangled in a fight over the issues. Clinton was attempting to "dissociate his campaign from everything Jackson symbol[ized] to white voters."<sup>79</sup> Clinton solidified this point by attacking Sister Souljah and pointing out Jerry Brown's embrace of Jackson to drive home Jewish votes.<sup>80</sup> On top of that, Jackson was forwarding a platform that few Democrats would back, a platform that promoted D.C. Statehood.<sup>81</sup>

To enter the door of the U.S. Senate, Jackson would have to be mayor for the District of Columbia--acting as a "shadow senator."<sup>82</sup> However, Jackson intended to elevate the symbolic position into tangible state representation, to be recognized with the same liberties as any other independent state. Yet, Senate precedents and the District's worsening image in Congress appeared to be working against him.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, access to the senate floor had not been allowed since the "shadow senators" of Tennessee were allotted seats in 1796.<sup>84</sup> If the party snubs Jackson's request, Democrats risk alienating Black voters. On the other hand, granting floor privileges to Jackson could give an unwanted impression that Democrats are advancing the cause of Statehood.

In his speech at the 1992 Democratic National Convention, Jackson praised both Clinton and Al Gore for their support of the Statehood position. In doing so, Jackson demonstrated the magnitude of his desire for such action in opposition to the events that unfolded in the previous month. Clinton went "ballistic" after an interviewer had "erroneously given him the impression that Tom Harkin, a rival of his for the nomination, had been endorsed by Jesse Jackson."<sup>85</sup> While Clinton side-stepped all aspects of Jackson's platform, he still operated off of the assumption that, "although Jackson [was] not running [that] year, the black vote was his to dispose of--or, at the least, that an endorsement by Mr. Jackson of someone

else would be so powerful that it would do Mr. Clinton harm."<sup>86</sup>

The bare fact that Jackson was promoting this "quasi-campaign" for D.C. Statehood could be analyzed in terms of a beaten man lowering his political aspirations to meet realistic expectations. Jackson's power and clout were not acknowledged in 1992--power and clout that Jackson felt he earned. The lingering threat of Black voting strength was not enough to warrant recognition from individuals in the electoral process. Jesse Jackson was ostracized from the process almost entirely.

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### CHAPTER 3.

#### A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF RHETORICAL NARRATIVE

##### FUNCTION IN JESSE JACKSON'S DISCOURSE

By understanding the functional role narrative plays in the formation of political and social reality, combined with the historical and political contexts addressed in chapter two, an examination of Jackson's narrative approach to politics is now possible. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the specific functions narratives perform in Jesse Jackson's campaign discourse. Jackson's 1984 address at the Democratic National Convention will be analyzed first, followed by his 1988 and 1992 convention speeches. The dynamic elements of metacode, context and structure, and their relationship to narrative function, as defined by Lucaites and Condit, will be operationalized in the analysis of Jackson.

Two types of narratives will be identified in Jackson's discourse. First, Jackson tells stories where meaning is established in reference to a larger frame of understanding. In other words, Jackson illuminates the substance of a larger issue or policy by offering a short story that condenses levels of complexity inherent in the larger position he promotes. Jackson uses narratives to simplify complex matters of race, economics, and social stratification. It follows then that Jackson might promote several political positions in a single oration through the

use of narrative. Secondly, the multiplicity of short stories told by Jackson in a single speech will be viewed as narrated accounts for constructing the larger "master narrative." While Jackson's shorter narratives serve specific functions, these smaller narratives can also be synthesized to identify one large narrative function. The larger narration or "master narrative" (a product of many stories) constitutes the ultimate ends to Jackson's rhetoric.

**THE 1984 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION:  
JESSE JACKSON'S RAINBOW COALITION: "YOUNG AMERICA DREAM"**

Jackson introduces his convention rhetoric with the telling of a mission, the "perfect mission" of the Rainbow Coalition that is sanctioned by God. Jackson calls for the "imperfect people" who belong to an "imperfect party" to unite with their "faith in a mighty God" on a quest for what is both religiously and morally right. Jackson assumes the stance of a prophet who intends to bind a constituency in the "hope" of "redirecting" a "nation on a more humane, just and peaceful course."<sup>1</sup>

"Tonight we come together bound by our faith in a mighty God, with genuine respect for our country, and inheriting the legacy of a great party-a Democratic Party-which is the best hope for redirecting our nation on a more humane, just and peaceful course. This is not a perfect party. We are not a perfect people. Yet, we are called to a perfect mission."<sup>2</sup>

The humanity of this justice is based on the moral obligation to "feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to house the homeless, to teach the illiterate, to provide jobs for the jobless, and to choose the human race over the nuclear race."<sup>3</sup> The role of God and the prophetic stance of Jackson are central to understanding Jackson's narrative logic.

The story of Jackson's mission is a story about personal, political, and social salvation. Christianity dictates the existence of only one "perfect" being, thus Jackson's story is internally consistent with the theological understanding of humanity's imperfections. Yet, if the mission is perfect, then the mission assumes infallibility; the mission becomes Christ-like. As Jackson narrates the call to perfect action, he personifies the qualities of a prophet, for only he understands the perfections and necessity of the mission. Furthermore, Jackson identifies his followers as the "damned, disinherited, disrespected, and the despised," who are "restless and seek relief."<sup>4</sup> One facet of Jackson's perfect mission then consists of healing the community of symbolic lepers, who translate into the economically and socially disadvantaged. Jackson then stands as the healing leader. Jackson ends the narrative telling that "[l]eadership can mitigate the misery of our nation. Leadership can part the waters and lead our nation in the

direction of the Promised Land."<sup>5</sup> For Jackson, leadership assumes the powerful qualities of a modern day Moses.

Lucaites and Condit claim that the universal medium of human consciousness is found in narrated "metacodes," which allow for the transcultural transmission of "messages about a shared reality."<sup>6</sup> Jackson forwards a religious metacode as the universal audience connective to sanction his political agenda. Jackson's rhetorical narrative functions both to validate him and his constituency in a religious context. The Rainbow Coalition can then be viewed as "God's Coalition."

After Jackson empowers the secular mission of the Rainbow Coalition, he tells another story in a different form that serves a different purpose. Jackson modestly lowers his rhetorical tone and pace to narrate his political accomplishments. Jackson narrates the stance of his own self-defined "humble preacher."

"Throughout this campaign, I have tried to offer leadership to the Democratic party and the nation. If in my high moments, I have done some good, offered some service, shed some light, healed some wounds, rekindled some hope or stirred someone from apathy and indifference, or in any way along the way helped somebody, then this campaign has not been in vain."<sup>7</sup>

While Jackson was dogmatic about his platform for the convention and confrontational on the campaign trail, he overly deflates the strength of his intentions and influence to suggest that he is pleased to have helped one

struggling individual. Lucaites and Condit claim that rhetorical narratives can "prepare an audience for the proof of an argument."<sup>8</sup> Jackson was preparing the audience for another argument as his humble tale functioned as an emotional appeal that prepared the audience to evaluate Jackson's attempt to recognize and rectify conflict that arose from his earlier "hymie" and "hymie town" remarks. Jackson claims that if his "low moments, in word deed or attitude, through some error of temper, taste or tone, ...have caused anyone discomfort, created pain, or revived someone's fears, that was not [his] truest self."<sup>9</sup> According to Jackson, the strength of a leader arises from the "humble" ability to admit "mistakes" while being "resilient" enough to "bounce back" and "fight."<sup>10</sup> This truncated tale of a humble preacher and political servant is advanced to construct a frame for viewing another narrative, a narrative that is told for *apologia*.

"I went to see Hubert Humphrey three days before he died. He had just called Richard Nixon from his dying bed, and many people wondered why. And I asked him. He said, "Jesse, from this vantage point, with the sun setting in my life, all of the speeches, the political conventions, the crowds and the great fights are behind me now. At a time like this you are forced to deal with your irreducible essence, forced to grapple with that which is really important to you. And what I have concluded about life," Hubert Humphrey said, "when all is said and done, we must forgive each other, and redeem each other, and move on."<sup>11</sup>"

Jackson had to address the "hymie" remarks to avoid a major ideological contradiction. How could Jackson speak for minorities and minority group advancement while at the same time using derogatory language to describe one group that he supposedly represented? As a corrective response, Jackson constructed a narrative that relied on analogous elements in an attempt to mend his remarks against the Jewish community. Jackson appeared to rectify his conflict with the Jews by apologizing in the manner that Humphrey apologized to Nixon (two long standing adversaries with a history of strife). Yet, Jackson never actually acknowledges Jews as the intended recipient of his forgiveness. In this instance, Jackson's apology could be construed as general consumption for any group or person hurt by a hard fought campaign. By relying on a narrated analogy as a form of apology, Jackson attempted to transcend an awkward situation without admitting any wrong doing. Rather than avoiding conflict, Jackson acknowledged it at the 1984 convention without actually addressing the substance of the derogatory Jewish remarks. Jackson's generic narrated apology actually functioned as a crisis management device that enabled Jackson to maintain an environment of control and power. This narrated account of power maintenance is exemplified in the unification story that followed.

"Our flag is red, white and blue, but our nation is a rainbow--red, yellow, brown, black, and white--we're all precious in God's sight. America is not like a blanket--one piece of unbroken cloth, the same color, the same texture, the same size. America is more like a quilt--many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, all woven and held together by a common thread.<sup>12</sup>"

Lucaites and Condit claim that "narratives associated with the function of audience adaptation have two formal characteristics: consistency and brevity."<sup>13</sup> The story and history of the United States can be capsulated in the symbolic metacode of the flag. For many Americans, the flag represents the reality and shared history of struggle and triumph, diversity and unity--and most importantly, freedom. However, Jackson challenges the universal meaning and representation of America's flag. Jackson tells a tale that disrupts one existing metacode of what it means to be "American," but in the disruptive process Jackson's story remains consistent with the beliefs Jackson's audience would hold about a rainbow which infers the existing structure or symbolic flag is not representative of "real America." Furthermore, the story Jackson tells claims that the flag does not represent all of God's people, thus the flag is not symbolic of God's creations. Jackson displaced the existing metacode which lacked universal representation by implacing patch quilt and rainbow metacodes that operated as a rhetorical attempt to change the vision of America.

The patch quilt metacode is important for other reasons that relate to class struggle and poverty. The singular "texture" of solid, "unbroken cloth" can be viewed as representational of predominantly "wealthy" white Americans who could afford the finer products of the textile industry. The historical, political, and social culture of the United States has been constructed and controlled by people of the "same color, same texture, and same size."<sup>14</sup> But Jackson's story tells the tale of different Americans that produced clothing which was constructed from "many patches, many pieces, many colors, [and] many sizes."<sup>15</sup> This unrepresented facet of America, the minorities and the poor, fashioned clothing out of hand-me-downs and leftovers. Together these pieces formulate a whole equal to the diversified audience, and when politically amassed, the rainbow of people form a powerful coalition. The patch quilt and rainbow can then be viewed as a more accurate representation of America than the flag.

The logic of the quilt story, its colors, and pieces have meaning for an audience that has been victimized by unfair, elitist policies. Jackson's rhetoric then appears to rely on the persuasive element of inclusion. "The white, the Hispanic, the black, the Arab, the jew, the woman, the Native American, the small farmer, the business person, the environmentalist, the peace activist, the young, the old, the lesbian, the gay, and the disabled



[made] up the American quilt."<sup>16</sup> Jackson incorporates many groups that compose America's make-up, yet the epicenter of current political power, big business, white males, etc., are tokenized or categorically negated from the "inclusive coalition." Jackson's form of inclusion is limited to "his people," the "damned" and "disinherited." While Jackson's narrative appears inclusive, it also appears to be equally concealing of "true" inclusion. Yet, Jackson is not trying to empower those who already possess a political stronghold.

By including all people (yet leaning heavily on groups that have been traditionally muted in politics), Jackson tells a power-based narrative as defined by Lucaites and Condit that works because it exposes the existing agency as corrupt.<sup>17</sup> The agency is transformed by the narrative agent which changes perception about the United States. Narratives can then be viewed, as demonstrated by Jackson, as an agent for change. Jackson's inclusive patch quilt story demonstrated the coalition's historical struggle in the face of an oppressive, non-inclusive government. Ultimately, the tale functions to displace the traditional story of what it means to be an American, symbolized with America's flag, by implacing a rainbow and patch quilt story that can include "everybody." Thus, the Rainbow Coalition is exposed through narrative as the representative of "all" people in the face of a system that only represents the elite few.

Jackson backed up his position of unification by proceeding to elaborate on the "common ground" that linked minority groups together. The ethnic and social linkages of "common ground" and "co-partner[ed]" religious histories were to be the uniting forces necessary to reach "higher ground." The higher ground of political empowerment had to be taken from the Reagan administration. Jackson's promise of a "war" over the platform's language turned into a war over ideals and morality as Jackson assaulted Reagan's policies. Jackson's war is a religiously sanctioned war between the moral superiority of liberal Democrats and the moral inferiority of Republicans. Given Jackson's reverend status and religious background, he stands as the "superagent" or spirit, manifesting himself in "progressively changing historical conditions."<sup>18</sup>

Jackson's strategy for changing the condition of superior power progress and subordinate class repression appears as a product of both religious and Populist doctrines. Jackson may be viewed as narrating the needs of the suppressed proletariat in the face of a capital controlling bourgeois government in a class struggle over economics and ultimately power. While Jackson's ideological foundation is based in religious and Populist rhetoric, the rhetorical form Jackson relies on to promote his political and ideological position is narrated.

At the 1984 Democratic National Convention, Jesse Jackson's discourse articulated constructions of political

reality in an attempt to change politics, the vision of America, and the Democratic platform. Jackson rhetorically built a Coalition "legacy" that was "more humane" and "just" because of its "perfect[ions]" in a state of political "imperfect[ion]." The "faith" and "together[ness]" of many was necessitated by Jackson to "bind" a constituency, backed by a powerful "mighty God," for the purpose of representing members of society that had previously lacked representation. Jackson brought the needs of the "damned, disinherited, disrespected, and despised" to the convention which changed the language and face of traditional politics. By humbly defining the "service" and "healing" qualities of leadership, Jackson stood as a type of political leader that acted on the wishes of Christ and "common folk" rather than private interest groups. Jackson was also able to create the appearance of managing conflict by reducing Jewish and African American tensions through the telling of stories. Finally, by demonstrating through narrative the imperfections of a "flag" that only represented an elite few, and reinventing a new story that represented the history of the poor and the struggle of the races, Jackson "wove" together the "many pieces" and "colors" of "real America" for the purpose of uniting a powerful, political organization called the Rainbow Coalition.

Jackson's narratives served the functions of:  
sanctioning the Rainbow Coalition as "God's Coalition;"

reducing conflict in the form of crisis management; unifying minorities in the face of oppression. Through the telling of stories, Jackson acted as the vehicle that gave voice to the politically muted. He physically amassed a major voter registration drive. Yet, the significance and power of this accomplishment was brought to the American consciousness by narration. By narrating the power of religion in rainbow politics, telling a story to meet conflict head-on, and displacing a long standing corrupt political history with a "new" American story, Jackson's convention rhetoric ultimately functioned to empower Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition while at the same time functioning to unite a stronger constituency for future Coalition aspirations.

**1988 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION:  
JESSE JACKSON'S, "COMMON GROUND AND COMMON SENSE"**

By 1988, Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition were managing an atmosphere of political optimism, hoping for a viable presidential challenge. Yet Jackson's popularity was declining in the public opinion poles. In March of 1988, of the 1500 persons interviewed, 38% polled felt unfavorable about Jackson while 40% polled claimed to be mostly favorable.<sup>19</sup> By late April, Jackson had dropped ten percentage points to only a 30% mostly favorable rating.<sup>20</sup> Jackson needed to gain support if he was going to reinvigorate the Rainbow Coalition campaign.

Jackson's 1988 address, like 1984, introduced religion as a central element in Jackson's narrated political strategy, yet the element of shared history and social struggle were added to his religious discourse to elevate the "arrival" of the Rainbow Coalition. Early in Jackson's convention address, Jackson defines the progress of African Americans in terms of being inextricably bound with the progress of the Rainbow Coalition and "white America." The African American's struggle for equality and power were directly connected to the uniting force of the Coalition. Jackson was bridging racial, social, and economic barriers by telling several stories that offered reasons for diversified voters to unite in the Coalition alliance

"Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lies only a few miles from us tonight. Tonight he must feel good as he looks down upon us. We sit here together, a rainbow, a coalition--the sons and daughters of slave masters and the sons and daughters of slaves sitting together around a common table, to decide the direction of our party and our country. His heart would be full tonight."<sup>21</sup>

If the "sons and daughters" of "slave masters" were white, and the "sons and daughters" of "slaves" were Black, then in this instance the coalition's story does not represent a "rainbow" of people. Yet, the story's logic relies on the audience's conscious acknowledgement of racial progress. Much like Jackson's Humphrey and Nixon story, an implied connective exists where if whites and

Blacks can surpass a history of inequality to unite as a coalition force, then arguably the rainbow of people would follow. If the oppressor and the oppressed can "sit together" at a "common table" that bypasses the history of inequality, then progress has been made in the favorable direction of mass equality. Ultimately, the story is revolutionary, the job that was started by King is finished by Jackson. Jackson told the classic tale of the hero who peacefully avenges the death of his "father," as King can be viewed as the symbolic liberating father of most African Americans. Jackson tells a story about long-coming success that functions as a testament to Jackson's ability for accomplishing a working, united coalition. Jackson's narrative then validates the coalition's political clout and influence by claiming to have overcome the obstacle of systematic discrimination by completing the task that King started.

Jackson's story of struggle and triumph continued to focus on extremism as adversaries in nature were symbolically united in a story where the condition of the country took precedent over individual political and social beliefs. Just as the basic colors of black and white are polarized in the spectrum of color, Jackson uses polar examples of predators and prey in nature to generate political and religious "common ground" for the purpose of universal "common good." Jackson tells of hawks and doves, and of lions and lambs:

"It takes two wings to fly. Whether you're a hawk or a dove, you're just a bird living in the same environment, in the same world. The Bible teaches that when lions and lambs lie down together, none will be afraid and there will be peace in the valley. It sounds impossible. Lions eat lambs. Lambs sensibly flee from lions. But even lions and lambs find common ground. Why? Because neither lions nor lambs want the forest to catch fire. Neither lions nor lambs want acid rain to fall. Neither lions nor lambs can survive nuclear war. If lions and lambs can find common ground, surely, we can as well, as civilized people."<sup>22</sup>

Jackson was leading a movement for reform, not revolution, and he had to maneuver around conservative Democrats and undecided Republicans. The "wings" necessary to "fly" are representative of the left (liberal) and right (conservative) wings of the U.S. political system, taken further, the Democratic left and the Republican right. Jackson's story was intended for two audiences, the Republicans and the Democrats. Interestingly, Jackson symbolically identifies the Republicans as the predatorial hawks and the Democrats as the peace seeking doves in keeping with his promise to deflate the escalating arms race.<sup>23</sup> The "Republican hawks" could be identified through the process of co-created meaning as the capitalist elite that prosper from the production and harvesting of finite resources. The tools of production have created the "acid rain," the threat of "fire," and the possibility of "nuclear war." The symbolic meaning associated with these

two polar-positioned birds, a hawk and a dove, would meet the "demands of the relationship between the specific audience to which [the narrative] is addressed, the specific context in which it appears, and the specific gain for which it strives" as defined by Lucaites and Condit.<sup>24</sup> The 1988 immediate and secondary audience were quite aware of the military build-up promoted by the Reagan administration combined with the looming threat of nuclear war and the active role Jackson was playing in disarmament. The referents of "hawk" and "dove" are commonly associated in the context of war and peace. Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition then begin to surface in the story as the peaceful means or "common ground" necessary to ending the cold war and saving the environment.

Jackson embellishes the meaning of his tale with a parable from the bible. Only in times of immanent danger did "lions and lambs lie down together." If the kingdom of beasts had the common sense for mutual survival, then Jackson infers that the "reasoning animals" have no excuse not to mediate a resolution toward peaceful, political cohabitation. Additionally, considering that much of the politically conscious audience would be aware of Jackson's progressive meetings with Mikhail Gorbachev, Middle East leaders, and various environment organizations,<sup>25</sup> Jackson established ethos as a peaceful spokesperson on global issues that were not being addressed by Reagan and the Republicans. Arguably, Reaganomics and the Reagan



administration could be viewed as destroying the environment and pushing the envelope of nuclear war.

Jackson combines a bird story with a moral parable, borrowed from the bible that involves an inductive progression from his previous story that illuminated coalition progress. The continued progress of the Coalition depended on the audience believing that human survival preceded political survival. Yet paradoxically, the story dictates that the condition of human survival can only occur with political empowerment of the Rainbow Coalition. Jackson's story about "hawks and doves" and "lions and lambs" then functioned to identify the Rainbow Coalition as the political party capable of saving the world from nuclear and environmental catastrophe. Jackson's tale demonstrates the active role the audience plays, as suggested by Lucaites and Condit, in consciously bringing their own reasoning and understanding to the meaning of a story. Jackson utilizes elements of extreme difference (Black and white, hawks and doves, lions and lambs) to emphasize the feasibility of "common ground," which helped Jackson bridge racial and political difference.

Jackson continued his theme of "common ground" from polarization by telling another tale that attempted to bring other opposite elements together. Jackson's story was about different personal "experiences," backgrounds, and "perspectives" that become similar in a quest for political power.

"Mike Dukakis' parents were a doctor and a teacher; my parents a maid, a beautician and a janitor. There's a great gap between Brookline, Massachusetts, and Haney Street, the Fieldcrest Village housing projects in Greenville, South Carolina. He studied law; I studied theology. There are differences of religion, region, and race; differences in experiences and perspectives. But the genius of America is that out of the many, we become one. Providence has enabled our paths to intersect. His foreparents came to America on immigrant ships; my foreparents came to America on slave ships. But whatever the original ships, we're in the same boat tonight.<sup>26</sup>"

The "common ground" in this story emphasizes similarity in difference within the exclusive notion of class and privilege. The "experience" and "race" of Dukakis are the product of a privileged, white "silver spoon" upbringing. The foundation of success established by the parents of Dukakis opened doors for his personal success. Jackson on the other hand, tells of his oppressed past, that has been argued to be creatively colored,<sup>27</sup> where Jackson had defied the odds in an upward struggle toward recognition and privileged status. Jackson's "race" and "experience" had told him that privilege is not universal when you're Black and poor. Jackson then personified the struggle from "ghetto" to "glory" by making it out of the "Fieldcrest projects," attaining an education, and surpassing the accomplishments of Dukakis by achieving the same political stature without the same resources. Jackson has done more because he did it with

less. However, the story implies that Jackson and Dukakis are the same in their difference and that is the "genius of America." Yet, an underlying message is being sent by Jackson which physically demonstrates that "anybody can make it" and that is another "genius of America."

The "providence" of their "paths intersecting" was not the providence of prudent management and preparation, but the providence of divine direction that would be religiously dictated by the divine intervention of God. The fact that Jackson and Dukakis were at the convention with the hope of presidential nomination would then be a product of "Godly work;" God has dictated their mutual destiny. Furthermore, the "ships" on which their "foreparents" arrived in America were representations of polar extremes. Dukakis' foreparents came to America by free choice, Jackson's foreparents came by force. Yet regardless of the historical influences that shaped the reasons for the "original ships" arriving in America, Jackson and Dukakis were both Democrats at the Democratic National Convention and thus in the "same boat." The sameness of this "boat" received its meaning from a story that bypasses the extreme differences of historical oppression, opportunity, and the diversity of privilege. In other words, Jackson's story necessitated that political conditions of ultimate importance must supersede personal, historical, and social differences. Jackson's "ship narrative" functioned to dismantle political and social

difference for the purpose of enhancing the coalition alliance. This point was made clear in the story that followed:

"Our ships could pass in the night if we have a false sense of independence, or they could collide and crash. We would lose our passengers. But we can seek a higher reality apart. We can drift on the broken pieces of Reaganomics, satisfy our baser instincts, and exploit the fears of our people. At our highest, we can call upon noble instincts and navigate this vessel to safety. The greater good is the common good.<sup>28</sup>"

Jackson's previous tale that emphasized one unified boat was divided into separate parties "ships" (Dukakis' ship and Jackson's ship) to warn of the consequences of party division. Common party ground would not be met if the "ships passed in the night" and a Republican victory might be secured if the Democrats "collided" in conflict. The "higher reality" and "greater good" of the story is an ironic message intended to offer the alternative to party unification, which would be the continued course of "drifting" Reaganomics. One facet of Jackson's "drifting ships" story consists of a subtle threat. The "passengers" in the story are symbolic of voters that might be lost to the Republican ticket if the Democrats become caught up in turmoil. The "drifting ships" story functioned as threatening backing to the previous story purposed for strengthening and aligning the coalition. Jackson's

"appealing tales" work because they "re-present the facts of a case in a conventionalized story form so as to make them appear both probable and compelling to a *specific* (emphasis Lucaites and Condit) audience."<sup>29</sup>

The unified meaning of the previous tales were solidified in the reintroduction of the "quilt of unity story" from 1984 with an added personal touch:

"America's not a blanket woven from one thread, one color, one cloth. When I was a child growing up in Greenville, S.C., and grandmother could not afford a blanket, she didn't complain and we did not freeze. Instead, she took pieces of old cloth-patches, wool, silk, gabardine, crockersack on the patches-barely good enough to wipe off your shoes with. But they didn't stay that way very long. With sturdy hands and strong cord, she sewed them together into a quilt, a thing of beauty and power and culture. Now, Democrats, we must build such a quilt."<sup>30</sup>

Jackson's, by 1988 highly recognized, patch quilt narrative had been redressed to enhance the meaning of multicultural representation. The united product of the finished quilt symbolically designates the united forces of diverse ethnicity as a wondrous completion of individuals. Jackson is again calling the poor and struggling to fight for their rights with a story that offered a different way to measure the fabric of the country. Also, the quilt of unity proved to be a provider for those in need, the many patches when united produced warmth against the cold. The quilt can then be recognized as a protector of universal

human rights. A prosaic story was offered by Jackson that told their is strength in numbers by unifying many pieces to produce one whole quilt or political body. In 1988, Jackson's "quilt narrative" functioned as the culminated meaning for unification not provided by his earlier unification stories. The reasons then for Democrats to unite in one strong offensive against the Republicans were offered in similar stories that could be synthesized into the simple interpretation of Jackson's quilt narrative.

Ultimately, by telling several narratives that called for togetherness, Jackson aligned his audience in order to demonstrate what they were fighting against. Jackson embellished the burden of the rising national debt and the war on drugs; the necessity for global trading partners; the lack of health care and job opportunities; and the working person's concern with the disparity of wealth. The disproportionate stratification of wealth was a salient issue for the people Jackson represented. Jackson identified Ronald Reagan as having control over wealth distribution and as the villainous cause of their anguish in a "reverse Robin Hood" story.

"For almost eight years, we've been lead by those who view social good coming from private interest, who viewed public life as a means to increase private wealth. They have been prepared to sacrifice the common good of the many to satisfy the private interest and the wealth of a few. We believe in a government that's a tool for our Democracy in service to the public, and an instrument of the aristocracy in search of private wealth. We believe in government with the consent of the governed of, for, and by the people. We must emerge into a new day with a new direction. Reaganomics, based on the belief that the rich had too much money--too little money, and the poor had too much."<sup>31</sup>

Jackson offers a Populist analysis to explain the inequity of wealth in America. The class structure is identified by Jackson as a dominant class mechanism using the producing class to further the needs of the rich without the relief of social mobility for the repressed. Jackson played on the classic tale of Robin Hood by reversing the structure of the story whereby Reagan is indirectly identified as taking from the poor and giving to the rich. While many people did accumulate and abundance of wealth during the "feel good eighties," a disproportionate number of people's gross income and overall "quality" of life remained unchanged or did indeed decrease. Yet, to claim that the monetary resources are being taken from the poor oversimplifies other dynamics like levels of education and job training that factor into employability and attaining "wealth." Still, Jackson's primary supporters

could adhere to such a story because the burden of guilt is removed from the individual for failing to attain the "American Dream;" instead, Jackson placed the burden of guilt on the shoulders of the presidency. It becomes easy then for members of the lower social strata to construct arguments to justify their deprived economic situation that is not a product of their own actions and accountability, but because of the actions of a government that keeps them down. Government, big business, and Ronald Reagan are the cause for the condition of the working class and the poor. Furthermore, Jackson's narrative operates as an unstated call to rectifying action. Given the content of Jackson's previous unification stories, the audience has enough information to connect their changing the system of "Robin Hood's" repression with uniting in the Coalition. Jackson's "reverse Robin Hood story" then functioned dualistically to expose Reagan and his policies as the corrupt element that the Coalition was fighting against and as another testament for uniting in the Rainbow Coalition.

Jackson said it best himself, in 1988 he was pushing for "common ground." Jackson told stories intended on strengthening his constituency for the purpose of being nominated to the democratic ticket for the presidency. But did his unification stories actually function on some level to meet his rhetorical needs?

Considering that Jackson was losing favorable impressions in the opinion poles prior to the convention,



his levels of success and how his narratives functioned can be identified in the out-polls that followed his "Common Ground" speech. According to Gallup Poll, 54% of the respondents that saw Jackson deliver his convention address were mostly favorable.<sup>32</sup> The sample population for the survey consisted of 380 men, 377 women, 66% were between the ages of 18 and 49, 50% from South and Midwest; 643 White, 107 Non-whites; 261 Democratic; and 226 Republican. Jackson told stories that constructed personal human meaning from removed objects like hawks and doves, lambs and lions, and ships. Jackson strategically placed symbolic objects in the context of political, social, racial, and economic situations so that the audience would be empowered to construct personal meaning from objects like hawks and doves by co-creating the meaning these objects assumed in the context which they appeared. By telling stories about unification from diversification, Jackson was able to bolster audience impressions of him. While Jackson did not gain enough support for a nomination, he did increase his favorability. The unification narratives that Jackson told at the 1988 Democratic National Convention increased his favorable public opinion from 30% to 54%. Thus, Jackson's stories can be seen as a contributing factor in this statistical increase.

**1992 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION:  
JESSE JACKSON'S, "THE MORAL CENTER"**

The attention, enthusiasm, and strength generated by the Rainbow Coalition's 1984 and 1988 campaigns was declining by 1992. To witness Jackson give his 1992 Democratic National Convention address was to observe a man that appeared wrathful, tired, and somewhat dismayed. Jackson was operating against a Clinton campaign that chose not to address the issues of "his people," which negated Jackson's platform and seemed to ostracize Jackson from the political process; the rainbow euphoria appeared over and the Jackson legacy was changing.

Jackson believed that if anything, the massive voter registration drives of the 1980's combined with the political clout he established during his two presidential challenges, translated into political bargaining power: if incoming political figures wanted the minority vote, they would have to make concessions with Jackson first.<sup>33</sup> However, front runner presidential candidate Bill Clinton chose to work around Jackson during his 1992 campaign by representing African Americans with up and coming voices like Vernon Jordan and Ron Brown. Clinton distanced himself from Jackson to avoid the controversy that Jackson usually generated.<sup>34</sup> In all, the mere fact that Jackson spoke at the convention appeared to be either a token gesture or a last minute attempt by Clinton to sway undecided voters usually aligned with Jackson. Still,

Jackson had a purpose for speaking at the convention that was far removed from his previous quests for the presidency.

At the beginning of Jackson's oration, he identifies Bill Clinton as having "survived a tough spring" that would make him "stronger for the fall."<sup>35</sup> Jackson offered few words in support of the Arkansas Democrat, belittling Clinton by inferring he might be the "young colt" of politics. However, Al Gore is introduced as the reassuring element for presidential victory; Jackson claimed Gore came to the "task tested and prepared" with the "reasoned voice" for "environmental sanity," a "supporter for social justice," and an "original sponsor of D.C Statehood."<sup>36</sup> The manner in which Jackson identified Clinton and Gore combined with the early introduction of Statehood for D.C. were indicative of the tone and purpose encompassed in Jackson's discourse. Furthermore, political conventions have been traditionally organized around a theme of renewal. Jackson entered the epideictic celebration of the convention to offer an interesting twist on the process of renewal by identifying the upcoming election as a "pregnant moment in history."<sup>37</sup>

"We stand as witnesses to a pregnant moment in history. Across the globe, we feel the pain that comes with new birth. Here, in our country pain abounds. We must be certain that it too leads to new birth, and not a tragic miscarriage of opportunity."<sup>38</sup>

The traditional convention story of "renewal" is transformed by Jackson into a mystical story of "new birth." The dynamics of mystification are played out in the uncertainty of outcomes--"new birth" or "tragic miscarriage." Jackson was beginning to lead the audience on a journey of uncertainty. The "pain" of disenfranchised Americans operated as the social glue that bound Jackson's audience, those who would be impacted by future policy, to the "birthing" process. Consistency in the theme of renewing America was maintained by Jackson, suggesting that with each election the country is symbolically reborn. Yet, the levels of optimism usually associated with the convention process were deflated or tainted by Jackson's "realist" stance that warned of potential tragedy. Jackson's 1992 convention rhetoric was an imbalanced view of America's social climate as he concentrated predominantly on the ill condition of the country which goes against the grain of convention discourse. The warnings of the introductory narrative were played out later in numerous narrated instances where Jackson told of actual "miscarriage[s] of opportunity" that had occurred. Jackson's "pregnant moment" narrative then functioned as a prudent warning. Jackson introduced the "pregnant moment story" early in the oration for the purpose of constructing a frame for viewing stories that followed where warnings were not heeded and "miscarriages of opportunity" came to fruition.

Jackson proceeded to define the "pain" of the country by geographic location. He told of the "millions" of people who were "unemployed," on "foodstamps," and "in poverty" without "health care" because of "repressive anti-labor laws."<sup>39</sup> A story was then offered as support for Jackson's warning where "repressive anti-labor laws" were identified as one "tragic micarriage of opportunity."

"We have a president who has traveled the world, but has never been to Hamlet, North Carolina. Yet we must not overlook Hamlet. It was there that 25 workers died in a fire at Imperial Foods, more women than men, more white than black. They worked making chicken parts in vats heated to 400 degrees, with few windows and no fans. The owners locked the doors on the outside. The workers died trapped by economic desperation and oppressive labor laws."<sup>40</sup>

After telling this story, Jackson claimed that "we must act to empower working people" and "build a movement for economic justice across the land."<sup>41</sup> One "step in the right direction" was being made by "Governor Bill Clinton" in his "expressed Democratic support for D.C. Statehood."<sup>42</sup> The progression to the Statehood support of Clinton was crucial to understanding the meaning of Jackson's "Hamlet story."

Jackson was attempting to construct an analogy between the District of Columbia and the tragedy in Hamlet, North Carolina. The meaning for the analogy was created by identifying D.C. after offering the Hamlet tale. As

Lucaites and Condit note, "the rhetorical narrative is functionally constrained to stop short of the formal stage of plot 'resolution' by virtue of its purpose to encourage audience enactment."<sup>43</sup> For Jackson's "Statehood narrative" to work, the audience needed to immerse themselves in the process of co-created meaning or reasoning in order to connect with Jackson's rhetorical goal. The narrative's meaning had to be produced by the audience to connect Hamlet with the District of Columbia.

While the president resides in D.C., the capitol does not have equal senatorial representation equivalent to other states, thus "like Hamlet," the District of Columbia has been "overlooked" by the presidency. The lack of "windows" and "fans" acted as the wall that separated Hamlet workers from the outside world, the workers were "trapped." Like Hamlet, the District of Columbia has also been denied access to "outside," national representation. The Hamlet employees were also "trapped" by "doors" that were locked from the "outside." Symbolically, the "economic" deprivation and "oppressive" conditions of the troubled District of Columbia are a product of an external, government regulated "lockout." The difficulties in Hamlet, North Carolina then become the difficulties of Washington, D.C. Jackson's "Hamlet story" then functioned to create political and social consciousness for advancing the cause of D.C. Statehood. By building arguably analogous elements between the capitol and Hamlet, the

audience was expected to associate the tragedy in Hamlet with the problems in D.C. as both being a product of poor government regulation and management. The "functional incomplete[ness]" of Jackson's story relied on both the "context in which the narrative appear[ed] and the claim that it support[ed]." <sup>44</sup> Yet there is an irony to Jackson's D.C. Statehood stance.

Jackson's discourse is contextually out of place in two ways. First, Jackson gave a deliberative (political in nature) speech in the epideictic (celebratory) arena. The body of Democrats gather at the convention for the purpose of promoting party unity, direction, and enhancing levels of enthusiasm. Jackson's language at the convention was political and personal, he disrupted the enthusiastic ambiance to focus on the nation's ills and advance the necessity for Statehood in D.C. Secondly, Jackson was addressing a general national audience to forward matters of specific local concern. The appropriate audience and context for D.C. concerns would appear to be with people primarily living in the capitol city and forums of local significance. Furthermore, the real irony of Jackson's speech arises from the "what if" scenario inherent in the D.C. stance; Jackson was narrating the conditions of a hypothetical situation. Prior to the convention, Jackson attempted to rally support for Statehood from other Democrats but found few supporters. <sup>45</sup> Democrats were concerned that even "granting floor privileges to Jackson

could give an unwanted impression that Democrats [were] advancing the cause of Statehood."<sup>46</sup> The only strong cause for advancing Statehood came from Jackson himself. In essence, Jackson was carving out a possible senatorial position for himself from the non-substantive possibility of Statehood enactment that had no tangible foundation of political backing; Jackson was engaged in a quasi-campaign for a senatorial position that did not exist in a state that did not exist.<sup>47</sup>

After Jackson made his case for Statehood, the internal logic and purpose for his rhetoric appeared to diminish. While Jackson continued to tell stories, the persuasive function for the telling lacked political meaning in the context of a national convention. He narrated on the problems with the Los Angeles riots; the floods in Chicago; the Middle East; the lock-out of Hatians; and the S&L bailout, yet these stories appeared to serve no purpose with regard to advancing Statehood. What might be concluded then is narratives lose their potency when not accompanied by a political goal that is both important to the rhetor and the audience. When a rhetorical political situation lacks an exigence, the story is powerless to convey any meaning in which the audience can adhere. Furthermore, it appears that one facet of narrative believability arises from the speaker's energy and apparent emotional investment in the story being told. Jackson deviated from his usual charismatic style of



telling stories as he appeared to merely "go through the motions" of giving a speech. However, Jackson's shift in style and his lack of political direction at the 1992 convention might serve to account for a major change in Coalition politics.

Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition filled a niche in American politics in 1984 that empowered Jackson and his constituency; the Coalition was a mobilized body to be reckoned with that gave voice to the politically marginalized--Jackson and "his people" were climbing. By 1988, the Coalition appeared to have utilized all of its energy and resources only to lose the Democratic nomination in what could be viewed as a political climax. Then in 1992, the Coalition was less organized, there was no unified goal in sight as Jackson went out predominantly on his own to bolster support for D.C. Statehood. It appears that a political progression of the Rainbow Coalition can then be plotted to show Jackson aspiring upward in 1984, peaking in 1988, and waning by 1992.

Jesse Jackson did tell a story about Hamlet, North Carolina that functioned to create political and social consciousness about the advancement of D.C. Statehood. While the Rainbow Coalition was by no means "dead" in 1992, Jackson himself appeared to have lost some hope. The mere fact that he was campaigning for D.C. Statehood seems to suggest that he had lowered his political aspirations. However, by tracking Jackson's diverse selection of

stories, the lack of any "real" political purpose, and the context in which his stories were told in his "Moral Center" oration proved conducive to accounting for how the Rainbow Coalition and Jesse Jackson evolved over time.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jesse Jackson, "The Rainbow Coalition: Young America Dream," Vital Speeches, 51 (1984): 77.

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, 1984, 77.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson, 1984, 77.

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, 1984, 77.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson, 1984, 77.

<sup>6</sup> John Louis Lucaites & Celeste Michelle Condit, "Reconstructing Narrative Theory: A Functional Perspective," Journal of Communication, Autumn (1985): 90.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, 1984, 77.

<sup>8</sup> Lucaites & Condit, 1985, 94.

<sup>9</sup> Jackson, 1984, 77.

<sup>10</sup> Jackson, 1984, 77.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, 1984, 78.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, 1984, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Lucaites and Condit, 1985, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, 1984, 78.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson, 1984, 78.

<sup>16</sup> Jackson, 1984, 78.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives, University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles, London, 1969: 15.

<sup>18</sup> Burke, 1969, 200.

<sup>19</sup> Gallup Pole Monthly, 270 (1988, March): 2.

<sup>20</sup> Gallup Pole Monthly, 271 (1988, April): 10.

<sup>21</sup> Jesse Jackson, "Common Ground and Common Sense," Congressional Quarterly, (July 23 1988): 2057.

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, 1988, 2057.

<sup>23</sup> Laura B. Randolph, "Can Jesse Win," Ebony, 43 (1988): 155.

<sup>24</sup> Lucaites & Condit, 1985, 94.

<sup>25</sup> Randolph, 1988, 155.

<sup>26</sup> Jackson, 1988, 2058.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas H. Landess & Richard M. Quinn, Jesse Jackson and the Politics of Race, (Jameson Books, Ottawa, Illinois, 1985): 139.

<sup>28</sup> Jackson, 1988, 2058.

<sup>29</sup> Lucaites and Condit, 1985, 95.

<sup>30</sup> Jackson, 1988, 2058.

<sup>31</sup> Jackson, 1988, 2059.

<sup>32</sup> Gallup Pole Monthly, 275 (1988, August): 26.

<sup>33</sup> Katz Giordano, "America's Great Black Hope," New Statesman and Society, 5 (1992): 146.

<sup>34</sup> George J. Church, "The Long Road," Time, (1992, November): 30.

<sup>35</sup> Jesse L. Jackson, "The Moral Center," Vital Speeches of the Day, 21 (1992): 652.

<sup>36</sup> Jackson, 1992, 652.

<sup>37</sup> Jackson, 1992, 652.

<sup>38</sup> Jackson, 1992, 652.

<sup>39</sup> Jackson, 1992, 653.

<sup>40</sup> Jackson, 1992, 653.

<sup>41</sup> Jackson, 1992, 653.

<sup>42</sup> Jackson, 1992, 653.

<sup>43</sup> Lucaites and Condit, 1985, 100.

<sup>44</sup> Lucaites and Condit, 1985, 101.

<sup>45</sup> Gary L. Gardner, "Jesse Jackson's Long Shadow," The Economist, 322 (1992, March): 32.

<sup>46</sup> Kitty Dumas, "Shadow Falls on Jackson," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 48 (1990): 3008.

<sup>47</sup> Dumas, 1990, 3008.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### CONCLUSIONS: NARRATIVE DISCOURSE AND JESSE JACKSON

The purpose of this chapter is to answer questions derived from the critical examination of Jackson's political narrations completed in chapter three. A number of conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of Jesse Jackson's use of narrative. Based on the narrative perspective of Lucaites and Condit, the issues that will be discussed include the ethical implications of narrative in politics, the personification of a prophet in politics, narrative as a rhetorical strategy, and Jackson's audience and the use of storytelling. Of principal concern will be the conclusions gained from narrative discourse as a vehicle for constructing political power. In Jesse Jackson's quest for political power, both Jackson and the constituency he built will be addressed to demonstrate why Jackson told stories in an attempt to meet his political goals. Furthermore, Jackson's lack of official legitimization in the political arena will be addressed in order to explain how Jackson managed power without holding political office. Finally, implications for future study of Jackson and narration will be offered.

### MANAGING POWER WITHOUT JURISDICTION

Probably the most interesting part of Jesse Jackson's political career lies in the fact that he managed to challenge the presidency twice without ever holding a political office. Jackson was able to bypass the ladder of gradual political advancement to be taken seriously by much of America as a viable presidential candidate. The critical question that needs to be answered is: how did Jackson manage to control a political platform without previously holding office?

While Jackson's political situation appeared problematic to some politicians and voters,<sup>1</sup> it appears as if Jackson would not have been able to accomplish what he did politically had he previously held office. Given the fact that Jackson was on the outside of a political system claiming "America-is-guilty, America-is-racist, business-is-bad, [and] defense is a waste,"<sup>2</sup> these views could not have been expressed as freely if Jackson had occupied recognized positions where he might have been bound in promises to other politicians, private interest groups, and lobbyists. Also, an ideological contradiction surfaces when individuals in a system speak out against the system of which they are an active, participating part. Furthermore, for Jackson to fault the political system where membership relies on re-election would be inviting political suicide. The fact that Jackson was an "outsider"

rather than an "insider" actually allowed Jackson to say the politically unspeakable about government, economics, and society in general, without risk. Jackson had little to lose and everything to gain.

It also made sense for Jackson to attempt entrance into the American political scene without previous electoral experience for other reasons as well. In Jackson's attempt to gain recognition for his community of "have nots," he was able to embody the essence of his mission while gaining representation and recognition for himself. Jackson was like his audience, and outsider trying to get in; he lacked political legitimization and appeared more sincere. Ultimately, Jackson was able to assume a unique political stance that enabled him to be more persuasive. He was an intelligent bystander looking inward on a political machine, claiming he knew what was wrong and how to fix it.

### **NARRATIVE AND ETHICS IN POLITICS**

Considering that "power cannot be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse,"<sup>3</sup> the narrative discourse form can be viewed as one useful means to attain political power because the story can be easily digested to create meaning for almost any audience. The story format is not complex. Story



telling appears to be a highly persuasive art because people are so accustomed to the format they become caught up in the telling, often without questioning the proof of the case at hand. The human act of telling stories is effective because the "collective consciousness" of societies have been saturated with meaningful tales. However, ethical and substantive problems can surface when utilizing the narrative form to influence social bodies.

Lucaites and Condit claim that "narratives associated with the function of audience adaptation have two formal characteristics: consistency and brevity."<sup>4</sup> Yet it appears that for narratives to be constrained to conciseness and brevity in all cases is paradoxical. How can a large problem, for example, be illuminated in a story that is consistent with the nature of the problem, while still being brief, and without oversimplifying complexities? The analysis of this research appears to demonstrate that narratives can oversimplify complex material. For example, Jackson over simplified the source and cause for the inequities of wealth in his 1988 "reverse Robin Hood" story. The amalgamation of social and economic ills were placed on the back of one source, Ronald Reagan. Reagan could be viewed problematically as one facet of several causes that induced low living standards for the poor, but not as the only cause. The critical question to ask then is, are Jackson's narratives representative of the actual cases being debated?

To answer this question, consideration must be given to the changing climate of contemporary American politics. Politicians currently fight to gain limited attention from a given audience that is bombarded with mass media alternatives other than the realm of politics. Therefore, large issues have been truncated into thirty second sound bites, mere inference, or conjecture. In the specific instance of Jackson's "Robin Hood" story, the disparity of income was oversimplified and not representative of the actual dilemma. Jackson's *ethos* must then be questioned when the audience is moved by a story that negates all the facts of the case.

However, Jackson's "rainbow and patch quilt stories" appeared to be exemplary of a creative narrative construction that was both internally consistent and representative in its brevity for "deciding the judgement of the day."<sup>5</sup> Lucaites and Condit claim that narrative should work as "proof of an argument by characterizing the probability of the case upon which judgement is requested."<sup>6</sup> Considering the ethnic diversity and economic orientation of the people Jackson claimed to represent, his "rainbow and patch quilt stories" characterized the American scene in such a way that the desirability of the "rainbow" being accepted as the new political scene was representative of both Jackson's audience and the "actual face" of American politics; Jackson was offering power to people who wanted power in a political system that would

not relinquish power. In other words, the exigence for the rhetorical situation was being met by Jackson in stories that represented a multiplicity of people that lacked representation; the meaning produced by the "rainbow and patch quilt stories" was representative of the needs of "his people" in a "closed society." The "rainbow and patch quilt" narratives worked because they were "probable" alternatives to the current system, worthy of the "judgement being requested." Jackson's "rainbow and patch quilt stories" were boldly powerful to the extent that the current power of the existing political system was being challenged.

The ethical underpinnings of narrative for the purpose of wielding power surface when audience adherence is gained from rhetoric that is lacking in logical reasoning and substantive justification for a course of action: narrative then has the power to disclose as well as conceal "reality." When Jackson attempted to rectify his "hymie" remarks, the stories he told were products of emotion; Jackson wanted the audience to forgive the "humble preacher." Yet, if Americans who witnessed Jackson forgave the racial slurs or had a better impression of Jackson's character because of a story that defined a man who erred in trying to help, then the forgiveness was in response to pseudo-reasoning, not cogent reasoning. When stories encourage the audience only to respond emotionally to a situation, a danger surfaces if the story overcomes the

analytical thought process, because people are so accustomed to the story form it is rarely questioned. The critical question that must be addressed is, does the speaker act in the best interest of the audience when the proposition of proof is an emotional construct that neglects "true" audience understanding? Ultimately, narratives can be abused to hide the "reality" of a case by cloaking "truth" in emotion.

### **THE PERSONIFICATION OF A PROPHET IN POLITICS**

When Jackson spoke at the 1984 Convention, he relied on his reverend status to articulate a prophetic stance by interpreting the Word of God. Jackson was able to personify prophetic qualities because his religious discourse already holds certain power for believers in Christian faiths. Jackson can be viewed as a prophet when the existing power of a discourse (the discourse of the Bible) is interpreted or "seen" only by Jackson who translates the message of God as the same message being advanced by the Coalition. The very act of telling stories could not exist without a medium to transmit meaning, the ability then to "tell" the story is in itself an act of power. When Jackson told his stories, he saw ways of understanding political problems that nobody else saw; at least they did not tell the story to prove it. However, by using the discourse of religion in the context of politics,

Jackson was able to enhance his character by saying he could be religiously defined in terms of being sanctioned and aligned with God which turns Jackson's politics into a religiously backed politics; the difference between religious rhetoric and political rhetoric become clouded. The religious story then supersedes the condition of Jackson being human as he becomes more like God. Religious narratives can then be told to empower and enhance the believability of the speaker because the religious story already holds a power that the speaker inherently does not. The power of religious discourse can be transferred to the speaker so that the speaker assumes the power.

#### **NARRATIVE AS A RHETORICAL STRATEGY**

Aside from the ethical and representative implications of truth in storytelling, the decision to tell stories proved to be an effective rhetorical strategy for Jackson. Jackson was trying to gain access to a political system that had traditionally locked out the constituency Jackson represented. Jackson was fighting against the long standing tale of "America the great," a myth that Jackson claimed did not work "for the people," only for the "chosen people." Jesse Jackson had to use the narrative form if he wanted to reinvent the "American story," to replace a story with a new story makes sense. If the "damned and disrespected" are mystified by a system of government that

claims to offer equality to all, and that group does not understand why they do not hold power in a system of equality that tells them it's there, then Jackson's choice of telling stories simplifies the terms of injustice so that audience identification with and adherence to the story's meaning is made easy. The story is a simple explanation to a complex problem and it creates power for the teller and those who believe by inferring that with belief comes political change and ultimately social power. In addition, the tradition of Southern Black oratory on which Jackson was reared emphasized the virtues of narrating biblical meaning. A large percentage of Jackson's audience had been equally influenced by the narrative form in sermons. In addition, both religion and politics regulate civil affairs in the forms of tradition, ritual, and collective guidance; story telling often plays an integral part in shaping the meanings for such public spectacles. The primary social service performed by both religion and politics is to dictate "proper" human interaction. The leap from religious story to political story then proved to be an easy transition for both Jackson and his audience.

The art of telling stories also appears to display competence of *elocutio* and *pronuntiatio*. In the telling, the speaker can demonstrate his or her proficiency as a rhetor. There exist levels of wit and insight that can be conveyed when the teller capsulates civil affairs into a

condensely packaged story. Both Jackson's 1984 and 1988 orations exemplified this type of insightful wit, colored in eloquence and competent speaking skill, that allowed Jackson to disseminate the energy and enthusiasm he had for the mission in the stories he told. Jackson's stories necessitated that the audience get involved in the euphoria. However, by 1992 Jackson's fiery style of oratory was smoldering, the stories appeared to be less potent due to a lack of speaker virtuosity. One may conclude that narrative believability exists in direct relation to speaking ability and the emotional investment made by the speaker in the story being told.

Jesse Jackson is a masterful story teller. Jackson narrated the story of many Americans who were being neglected in political debates. Where other politicians conceded not to address the issues of the marginalized, which made sense considering the lack of political clout this group possessed, Jackson stood up and told the story that the politically ignored needed to hear. Jackson told tales that asked the audience to fight for the rights they deserved. Gaining an alliance with narrative does not appear to be a mystery. If people hear their views and voice in a story, it seems reasonable that those people would adhere to the person representing them. Jackson was able to empower himself by speaking the collective consciousness of a body of people that yearned to have their story told.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Jesse Jackson has yet to find an office, and his future in politics still remains uncertain. Currently, Jackson is speaking out on the issues of inner-city violence, gangster rap, and Black on Black violence. Given Jackson's opportunistic ability to remain in the spot light (he has always been prepared to jump in front of a camera), closer examination of how Jackson attempts to gain adherence for his ideas would appear in order. Interesting insight might be gained about Jackson's political intent by studying how Jackson's stories differ among specific audiences. For example, do Jackson's stories differ when he speaks to a primarily African American audience in contrast to a mostly white audience? Whether or not Jackson continues to rely on the rhetoric of narrative would be an intriguing area of study.

Other modes of criticism outside the frame of narrative surfaced during the research that might also enhance our understanding of Jackson. From the analysis it would seem appropriate to conduct a Populist critique of Jackson. Also, an examination of Jackson's 1988 attempt at *apologia* alone would be conducive to understanding the dynamics of conflict reduction and general human attempts to apologize in politics.

The use of narrative in the political arena has been viewed with some skepticism by the American people, as if



the telling of stories has some how clouded the political process and cluttered the substance of the real issues. What does this change, a product of "30-second" politics, say not only about Jackson, but about political rhetoric in general? While the narrative form has a long history in the political process, the lack of time devoted to individual campaigns appears to have set a stage that demands story telling.

Lucaites and Condit have made a unique contribution to rhetorical theory and criticism with their claim of a narrative function. The perspective Lucaites and Condit offer allows for identification of narrative influence in shaping political and social consciousness. Yet, the element of speaking ability and the speaker's demonstration of wit and intelligence appear to be significant influences in the believability of the speaker and the overall function of the narrative. A rhetor that can narrate effectively will convey insight about situations that seem to be a powerful means to enhance *ethos*. Lucaites and Condit strongly emphasize audience and context, and rightfully so. However, the speaker's skill in narration might be central to all other factors in the shaping of human consciousness and audience adherence. If the speaker offers a lousy portrayal of a given narrative, lacking in eloquent style and skill, all other factors of the rhetorical situation appear irrelevant. Furthermore, Lucaites and Condit do not address the element of frequency

in the power constructs produced by narrative. From the research on Jackson, there appears to exist necessary elements of story repetition and multiplicity for the wielding of power. In other words, Lucaites and Condit do not enumerate on how many stories, told often to a diversified audience can work as a narrative whole that ultimately operates as the narrative amalgamation which allows power to surface. This study then may demonstrate how several stories come together to create conceptions of power. Lastly, it appears that in order to promote consciousness about political power, the audience must hear their voice or beliefs somewhere in the telling in order for the audience to uphold a political figure as their leader.

Finally, whatever the answers to these questions, the rhetorical narrative driven toward power-based movement played an important role in Jesse Jackson's political ambitions. The history and background of Jesse Jackson, combined with the critical tool provided by Lucaites and Condit, and the contextual ground on which Jackson operated allowed for the critical evaluation of Jackson's narrative. This study was then able to arrive at some conclusions and raise some questions.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Victor Navasky, "For Jesse Jackson and His Campaign," The Nation, 246 (1988): 518.

<sup>2</sup> Ben J. Wattenberg, "The Curse of Jesse," The New Republic, 199 (1988): 20.

<sup>3</sup> Henery A. Giroux, "Reading Texts, Literacy, and Textual Authority: Voice and Politics of Identity," Journal of Education, 172 (1990): 85.

<sup>4</sup> Lucaites and Condit, 1985, 95.

<sup>5</sup> Lucaites and Condit, 1985, 94.

<sup>6</sup> Lucaites and Condit, 1985, 94.

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