Barack Obama: Our Pop Culture President … and the End of Racism in America?

Sarah Hentges, Fulbright Scholar
Center for American Studies, SDU
www.cultureandmovement.com
Dave Chappelle, Stand-up special “Killing Them Softly” 2000

• The first black president.... better watch out!
“Black Bush”
2003-2006
Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.

— Bertolt Brecht
1898–1956
Pop Culture Celebrated Obama

Tons of t-shirts, posters, and other merchandise...
Young Jeezy, “My President” (feat. Nas)

- My President is black; My Lambo’s blue....”
- “We ready for damn change so y’all let the man shine/ Stuntin’ on Martin Luther, feeling just like a king/Guess this is what he meant when he said that he had a dream.”

Written 5 months before Obama was elected
Recorded when clinched Democratic nomination
Video recorded Nov. 23, 2008
Will.i.am, “Yes We Can”

• Promotional video released Feb. 2, 2008
• From Obama’s concession speech in New Hampshire Presidential Primary
• Performers and celebrities
• Collage and Hip Hop call and response fashion
• Later featured on Obama campaign community site and played before a campaign rally in Wisconsin on Feb 12
Will.i.am song, “A New Day”

- Tribute to Obama’s victory
- Released as promotional single on November 7, 2008 from political compilation album, *Change Is Now: Renewing American’s Promise*
- First performed on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*
January/February 2017 cover story, ‘My President Was Black,’ Ta-Nehisi Coates

‘I think our basic assessment was maybe we had a 20-25 percent chance of winning,’ Obama says of his run for president. ‘But what I never doubted was my ability to get white support.’

(“This short animation uses recordings from Coates’s conversations with Obama to illustrate the young president’s doubts and convictions along the way.”)
Backlash
Obama Waffles

Change you can taste.

Lawdy, I sho' loves campainnin'!

Uncle Sambo's Obamanation
Even after being President for years...
MICHELLE

Melania

MAKE THE FIRST LADY GREAT AGAIN!
The single greatest act of racism in American history was the election of Barack Obama. People voted for him simply because he was black.

FWD: Obama voters are RACISTS
Our Pop Culture President
“Cultural Icon”

“Wry observer of popular culture”

“The president of pop culture”

“May be the hippest president”

“It must kind of stink that you can’t run three times”

“That’d sorta be like doing a 3rd Hangover movie. Didn’t work out very well did it”

“He’s down with Jay-Z, need we say more?”

“close relationship to pop culture”
Critics noted that he was the first President to make the rounds on the late night talk show circuit.
Hamilton Begins at the White House
Hamilton Says Farewell to Obama
I may be a little grayer than I was eight years ago, but this is what a feminist looks like.

""

President Barack Obama
June 14, 2016
Pop Culture President

It's a Brave New World

Obama Collects Comics, relies on his trusty Blackberry, and embraces the Internet

What's the World Coming To?
“Racism, we are not cured of it. And it's not just a matter of it not being polite to say n****r in public. That's not the measure of whether racism still exists or not. It's not just a matter of overt discrimination. Societies don't, overnight, completely erase everything that happened 200 to 300 years prior.”

PRESIDENT OBAMA
WTF Podcast with Marc Maron
RACISM was almost DEAD in America until OBAMA.
Looking Forward
The American story, which was my story, was not the tale of triumph but a majestic tragedy.
The Atlantic, October 2017 issue

Click image above for link to article

The First White President

The foundation of Donald Trump's presidency is the negation of Barack Obama's legacy.
BREAKING NEWS

TRUMP: "I AM THE LEAST RACIST PERSON"

Donald Trump isn't our First White President
“To be optimistic about the long-term trends of the United States doesn’t mean that everything is going to go in a smooth, direct, straight line. ... It goes forward sometimes, sometimes it goes back, sometimes it goes sideways, sometimes it zigs and zags.”

PRESIDENT OBAMA
COMING TO NETFLIX
De-Von-Tré (Chance the Rapper, Kenan Thompson, Chris Redd) wishes President Barack Obama would come back. [Season 43, 2017]