

## Operant Subjectivity

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### Academic Narratives on the Obama Legacy

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to examine early understandings of the Obama legacy among presidential scholars. From the vast commentary on Obama and his legacy, we abstracted hundreds of statements and then sampled 40 of these representing various aspects of the Obama presidency. This 40 item Q sample and detailed instructions were sent to 150 presidential scholars who were asked to render their opinion on the Obama Legacy by ranking the 40 items. Responses were received from 26 academics and the analysis produced four competing narratives on the Obama legacy.

**Keywords:** legacy; narratives; Barack Obama; president; Q methodology

### Introduction

We begin our study of President Barack Obama's legacy by adopting the perspective of Murray Edelman (1988) who suggests that politics be examined as spectacle. This is based on Edelman's argument that ". . . political developments are ambiguous entities that mean what concerned observers construe them to mean" (Edelman, 1988, p. 1-2). We can best comprehend politics, according to this viewpoint, not by endlessly searching for singular explanations of a particular event, or the meaning of a popular figure or symbol, but rather by focusing on the range of meanings and understandings which exist about such an entity. Accordingly, our purpose here is to discover the various narratives of the Obama legacy that exist at a particular point in time among academics who study the American presidency. Toward this end, we employ Q methodology to discern the developing narratives of academics on the Obama legacy as these were evolving during the final months of his presidency.

Even before Obama completed the first two years of his first term, extended discussion had already emerged about his eventual legacy (Dallek, 2012; Davis, 2012; Edwards, 2012; Jacobs and King, 2010; Lamb, 2011; Rockman, Rudalevige, and Campbell, 2012; Skocpol and Jacobs, 2011). As the end of his second term approached, the literature swelled exponentially (Bruce, 2016; Cole, 2016; Graham and Solon, 2015; Lynch, 2016; Younge, 2016) and continues at an accelerated pace in the post administration period (Baker, 2017; Chait, 2017; D'Antonio, 2017; Rottinghaus and Vaughn, 2018; Rich, 2019) A considerable portion of this commentary is undeniably

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imbued with a strong partisan cast, whether it comes from politicians, journalists, political strategists, ideologically driven “think tanks,” pundits and other media commentators, or the public-at-large through social media, and are generally predictably supportable or inhospitable to Obama. In this project we focus on the interpreters of the Obama legacy who are professional academics — primarily political scientists or historians — who have studied and written on the presidency and/or Barack Obama. We direct attention to such academic authorities not only because of a personal interest in seeing what our colleagues have to say on this subject, but in an effort to find what might be considered an “objective” viewpoint. As Fred Greenstein (1983, p. 1) years ago suggested, academics write

not as political practitioners, spokesmen for the present or past administrations, or enunciators of our own political philosophies. We seek to arrive at a dispassionately analytic appraisal of the . . . presidency, with attention both to the principal policies it has advanced and how it has advanced them.

Greenstein’s position about the “objective” aspirations of academic assessments of presidents has been challenged by many (Bose, 2003; Felzenberg, 1997; 2003; Nelson, 2000; Nichols, 2012; Rudalevige, 2015; Sides, 2011; Taranto and Leo, 2004; Uscinski and Simon, 2011). Such critics argue that academic presidential rankings suffer from the same partisan bias, as well as other forms of bias, similar to non-academics who rank and evaluate presidents. We will return to this matter subsequently as our results will allow us to at least offer some commentary on this disagreement. Nevertheless, it would seem to be relevant to obtain the viewpoint on the Obama legacy from academics who have devoted much of their professional lives to the study of presidential issues like this.

Legacy assessments inevitably encounter questions pertaining to what point in time it is appropriate to take the president’s measure? There are distinct advantages and disadvantages of various time frames. Tim Blessing (2011) notes that academic assessments of presidential legacies — and the criteria that influence them — evolve through a series of sequential stages. The earliest stage includes the time prior to becoming a presidential candidate where the individual “gains a reputation suitable to be considered as being presidential” (p. 215). The next stage is the campaign where a candidate’s credibility or liabilities can be defined. The third phase is when the president is in office, and it is during this period that “powerful summative narratives emerge and evolve” (p. 216). Then, according to Blessing:

At the end of a president's occupancy of the office, the narratives that have survived the chaos of a term are then sorted, in a fourth phase, by pundits, academics, the public, the media, and special groups of all types. It is also shaped by subsequent political campaigns in which the ex-president is either praised or vilified. Moreover, since different groups remember different things — and each group remembers the same things differently — the narratives that form during this phase engage in a Darwinian struggle with each other — but with no guarantee that the “fittest” will survive (p. 216).

It should be noted that such a “Darwinian” sifting and winnowing process in the scholarly depiction of meaning for political events, symbols, or spectacles is not unusual. Marjorie Randon Hershey (1993) noted a similar process in efforts to draw conclusions about the meaning of the “mandate” emanating from an American presidential election. And other research on electoral mandates demonstrates that,

among academics, the outcome of this process yields a variety of different interpretations (Thomas and Baas, 1996).

The current study focuses on the latter stages of the Obama administration where, to use Blessing's terms, "summative narratives" had begun to emerge and the winnowing process of sorting out the contending early narratives was arguably well underway. Focusing on this period also has other advantages. Indeed, Stanley Renshon (2014) noted midway through Obama's second term that the time he has already served in the White House

offers ample material for assessing his presidency in the larger context of history. In fact, considering a president's legacy while he is still in office is an essential means of preparing the foundation for historical judgment — the first draft of the first draft, so to speak (p. 45).

In addition to timing, an important consideration in the examination of presidential legacies, obviously, is the criteria employed in assessments of performance. Most surveys that have assessed academic perspectives on presidential legacies have either had respondents rank the presidents (Schlesinger, 1948; 1962) or, alternatively, utilized a wide variety of different traits or characteristics and asked scholars to rate each president on each trait (Maranell, 1970; Simonton, 1986). Some have used similar but more complex rating systems (Murray and Blessing, 1983). Responses from these surveys are generally averaged across presidents to come up with a composite score on which the presidents can then be ranked. Recent surveys of academic evaluations of President Obama generally continue this practice. For example, in a recent survey, scholars at the Sienna Research Institute (Kelly and Lonnstrom, 2010) received 238 responses from presidential scholars who ranked 43 presidents including Barack Obama. Specifically, scholars were asked to rank the presidents on 20 separate characteristics and a series of accomplishments. Overall, Obama came out ranked 15<sup>th</sup> among all presidents. A slightly different ranking procedure was used by *Newsweek* (2012); in this case, a panel of 10 distinguished historians were asked to rank the 10 best presidents since 1900. Each of the historians submitted a top 10 list and the final ranking was an average of these specific rankings. President Barack Obama came in at number 10, dead last. In yet another variation on this approach, the *History News Network* (2013) sent out a survey to 679 professors at "top" ranked universities in the US. Responses were received from 203. Respondents were asked to give Barack Obama a grade (A to F) on 15 separate traits. They also were asked to give Obama an overall grade and then provide comments to justify their grades. Letter grades were converted to 4.0 GPA metrics, and Obama received an overall grade of B-. In yet another variation of survey-based ranking analysis, Nate Silver (2013) from the webpage *FiveThirtyEight* used previous surveys of academics and subjected them to a regression analysis to analyze presidential rankings and found Obama to be ranked 17<sup>th</sup> overall.

In addition, political scientists Brandon Rottinghaus and Justin Vaughn (2015), working with the Brookings Institution, received 162 responses from a survey of the 391 members of the presidency section of the American Political Science Association. The authors asked respondents to rate each president on several metrics and average scores for each president were reported that ran between 0 and 100. From this analysis, President Obama ranked 18<sup>th</sup> among all presidents. In a more recent survey by the same authors (Rottinghaus and Vaughn, 2018), Obama jumped 10 places to 8<sup>th</sup> overall. It seems that scholars on American politics from the UK generally have a higher opinion of Obama than their American counterparts. In 2010, 47 American specialists from the UK

were asked to rank American presidents on five different criteria. Of the 40 presidents compared in this analysis, President Obama emerged with a ranking that put him in eighth place (Morgan, 2011).

These findings on Obama are interesting and provide some insights into how academics rate Obama on various traits and issues and how he ranks relative to other presidents. When individual ratings of a president on specific issues are summed up, combined and averaged across many scholars, however, the result is just that: an average across many scholars of how a president is rated on separate characteristics. The researcher then takes these results and constructs other scores or rankings. While important and interesting, lost in this process is the individual, possibly unique, perspective of each scholar's narrative understanding of a given president's performance in the face of a distinct context of challenges and resources.

After a review of the literature, the more "holistic" approach advocated by Burns, Schlesinger, Jr., and Greenstein (2003) offers the best approach to understanding the current status of the Obama legacy. Like them, we prefer an approach that allows for an "overall" judgment including an evaluation of the president's traits and policies, but also his accommodation to various situations and problems and "the values the president embodies" (p. 76). By the same token, we believe that Blessing (2011) was on the right track with his discussion of the development of summative narratives about presidents throughout their terms. Blessing's suggestions about the evolution of narratives fits nicely with the Burns, Schlesinger, Jr. and Greenstein concern about a more holistic approach. From this perspective, narratives on presidential legacies would include continually evolving "holistic" evaluations of presidents as knowledge and understanding of them increases. To be sure, traits are included in these narratives, but are only a part of this overall evaluation process rather than separate and discrete components. Accordingly, in this study we follow suggestions drawn from Burns, Schlesinger, Jr., and Greenstein as well as Blessing and focus on academic narratives on Obama's legacy. We also focus on determining these narratives directly from the subjective perspective of individual scholars themselves rather than having this perspective obscured in the process of seeking to obtain more "objective" averages and measures that apply to all presidents regardless of political time or circumstance.

A study reported in *New York Magazine* (2015), at least in part, is an effort to provide a more holistic narrative on the Obama legacy. Researchers received responses from 53 historians to an open-ended questionnaire that included almost 20 questions about various aspects of the Obama presidency. The authors took these responses and provided quotations — sometimes extensive — of the "most thought provoking" answers. In addition, and most important, they printed the responses to the open-ended questions of all 53 historians by name. When printed out all this information runs to well over 100 pages of fascinating commentary about the Obama legacy. However, readers are left with the task of coming up with their own summary of the results. So while the article comes closest to uncovering holistic narratives on President Obama, the study stops short and simply supplies the unedited commentary with no effort to tie the observations into cohesive – or composite — narratives. Essentially, our study of the Obama legacy begins where *the New York Magazine* study ends.

## Methods

Focusing on narratives of presidential legacies necessitates using a different methodology than those used in previous studies. As indicated in previous research (Thomas and Baas, 2008) on various aspects of the "narrative presidency," Q technique

and its methodology (Brown 1980; McKeown and Thomas, 2013; Stephenson, 1953) provide an excellent means of discerning narratives about particular individuals or events. Individuals are presented with the various “ingredients” expected to be included in any narrative on the subject and given the opportunity to integrate these various components into an overarching narrative that reflects their point of view. The process begins with an identification of the *concourse of communication* (Stephenson, 1978) under consideration and the development of a Q sample that represents that concourse. An analysis of the *New York Magazine* article and many other sources where academics had written about the Obama legacy produced an extensive concourse of communication, numbering well into the hundreds, from which 40 statements were eventually selected. To assist in ensuring a representative sample of statements, the following framework was utilized:

### Figure 1

#### *Framework for Statement Selection: Obama Legacy Study*

Substance	a) race/personal	b) political/institutional	c) domestic policy
	d) foreign policy		
Valence	e) positive	f) neutral/ambivalent	g) negative

*4 x 3 = 12 combinations of the two main effects. 3 statements per combination = 36 statements + 4 additional statements = 40 item Q sample*

Three statements were selected for each of the 12 combinations of the statements. For example, three positive statements about race or personal issues, three positive statements about political and institutional concerns, etc. Several additional statements were added to some categories to acknowledge their greater representation in the concourse. A complete list of these items is contained in the Appendix.

The 40 item Q sample along with instructions was sent to 150 academics, mostly political scientists or historians. Academics were selected who were known to be knowledgeable about presidential politics or who had recently published research on either the presidency or Obama. Participants were invited to model their opinion on the Obama legacy by ranking the statements according to the following scale:

### Figure 2

#### *Scale for Obama Legacy Q sort*

	Most Disagree					Neutral Ambivalent					Most Agree
Scale	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Statements	(3)	(3)	(3)	(4)	(4)	(6)	(4)	(4)	(3)	(3)	(3)

Following this scale respondents were asked to go through all the statements and find the three they agreed with the most or were most characteristic of their perspective and give them a +5. They were then to find the three they disagreed with or were least characteristic of their viewpoint and give them a -5. They were to repeat this process

going back and forth until they had ranked all the statements on the scale. They were allowed to deviate from the exact scale if they felt it necessary.

Completed Q sorts were received from 26 academics. The response is somewhat disappointing but is consistent with other research on academic perspectives (Baas, 2018; Thomas and Baas 1996; 2008). These were correlated and factor analyzed using centroid factor analysis and judgmental rotation. Judgmental rotation was particularly appropriate in this case because the analysis is exploratory and the perspective of several of the respondents' views were known already because of their published work. Judgmental rotation allowed for an examination of the data from the perspective of some of these known viewpoints as well as others. The factor scores for each statement for each factor are in the Appendix. The factor scores represent a composite ranking of the statements for each factor. In this sense, each factor represents a different perspective or narrative on the Obama legacy and the composite rankings (factor scores) allow for an interpretation of that particular narrative. The factor loadings and selected background characteristics are presented in Table 1. Factor loadings run from -1.0 to +1.0 and indicate the degree of correlation of each person with that particular factor or narrative. As indicated, there are four factors and all persons except three are loaded on at least one of these factors. One of these persons was loaded on a 5<sup>th</sup> factor but was the only one on this factor and at this time that factor has been excluded from this analysis. Factor loadings +/- .40 and above are significant  $p < .01$ . It is important to note that responses from the two of the persons who were not on any factor were received almost three months after others had completed the Q sort. Their responses were delayed because both of these persons were out of the country when materials were initially mailed.

Looking at the background characteristics of respondents, they are all, with one exception, males. It would appear that comments by Burns, Schlesinger, Jr. and Greenstein, (2003) about "the sheer maleness of the rating game (that) consists of mainly male scholars evaluating invariable male presidents" still prevails (p. 73). In this case an effort was made, obviously to no avail, to seek out more female scholars. All the respondents have Ph.D.'s except one who has a JD. They are a very mature and experienced group. The average age is 53 and they average almost a quarter of a century (22 years) of experience as professional academics. Thus, we have tapped a very knowledgeable and experienced group. They are primarily Democrats and most at least lean towards being liberal. Most at the time they completed the Q sort would have voted for Clinton or Sanders, five would have voted for Kasich, and three indicated they would either vote for someone else or would not vote. None said they would vote for Trump. This left-leaning, Democratic "partisan bias" in studies of scholars who study the presidency is not unusual. While no specific statistics exist about the exact partisan distribution of presidential scholars, our previous research (Thomas and Baas, 2008) on the same audience, as well as the research of others (Schlesinger, 1948) reflected the same partisan skew

As indicated, four factors resulted from this process. In many instances all four factors would not have been kept because so few Q sorts loaded on some of them. However, because this was a preliminary analysis — "the first draft of a first draft" — and because this was an early part of the "Darwinian" struggle for survival, it was decided to retain and report all four factors. The existence of four factors, two of them bipolar, suggests that there is a good deal of diversity among presidential scholars on the Obama legacy, at least as the 44<sup>th</sup> President was in the process of completing his second term. At the same time, it warrants noting that almost half of the respondents are loaded significantly on the

positive end of factor I, which seems to indicate at least some degree of consensus — at least among left-leaning Democrats. As we will see, however, some Republican and more conservative scholars, as well as some of the other Democrats, give voice to a different narrative understanding of the Obama legacy.

**Table I**  
*Factor Loadings and Background Characteristics*

Demographics								Factor Loadings*			
No.	Sex	Age	Ed	Exp	Party	Ideo	Vote	I	II	III	IV
1	Male	60+	PHD	40+	Ldem	Llib	Sanders	<b>88</b>	24	07	-19
2	Female	30-39	PHD	1-10	Dem	Lib	Clinton	<b>83</b>	-10	-14	-16
3	Male	60+	PHD	40+	Ldem	VLib	Sanders	<b>82</b>	02	09	-21
4	Male	50-59	PHD	21-30	Dem	Llib	Clinton	<b>79</b>	02	07	18
5	Male	60+	PHD	40+	Sdem	VLib	Sanders	<b>76</b>	04	34	17
6	Male	60+	PHD	31-40	Sdem	Lib	Clinton	<b>72</b>	11	36	16
7	Male	40-49	PHD	1-10	Dem	Lib	Clinton	<b>70</b>	33	-04	-26
8	Male	40-49	PHD	11-20	Sdem	Lib	Sanders	<b>69</b>	-26	-07	32
9	Male	50-59	PHD	11-20	Ind	Mod	Clinton	<b>52</b>	00	-12	33
10	Male	40-45	JD	1-10	Ldem	Lib	Clinton	<b>51</b>	04	-07	34
11	Male	40-45	PHD	11-20	Dem	---	Clinton	<b>47</b>	21	-35	19
12	Male	50-59	PHD	11-20	Dem	Llib	Sanders	<b>44</b>	-12	-09	-27
13	Male	60+	PHD	40+	Ind	Mod	Not /Other	<b>-48</b>	37	-07	15
14	Male	60+	PHD	31-40	Rep	Con	Not/Other	08	<b>75</b>	-06	-02
15	Male	30-39	PHD	11-20	Lrep	Lcon	Kasich	18	<b>69</b>	38	-04
16	Male	40-49	PHD	11-20	Rep	Lcon	Kasich	-39	<b>64</b>	-4	-09
17	Male	40-49	PHD	11-20	Ldem	Lcon	Kasich	21	<b>40</b>	-15	22
18	Male	30-39	PHD	1-10	Lrep	Lcon	Kasich	-05	<b>40</b>	-34	-03
19	Male	60+	PHD	31-40	Dem	VLib	Clinton	36	19	<b>67</b>	25
20	Male	60+	PHD	21-30	Dem	Lcon	Clinton	18	08	<b>40</b>	-14
21	Male	30-39	PHD	1-10	Ind	Mod	Not /Other	-29	12	<b>-41</b>	10
22	Male	50-59	PHD	11-20	Sdem	VLib	Sanders	32	18	-20	<b>50</b>
23	Male	30-39	PHD	—	Sdem	VLib	Sanders	32	10	15	<b>48</b>
24	Male	40-49	PHD	1-10	Ind	Mod	Kasich	-26	14	-10	14
25	Male	50-59	PHD	11-20	Ind	Lcon	Hillary	30	30	-23	-22
26	Male	30-38	PHD	1-10	Ind	Lcon	Sanders	-12	01	16	11

## Results

### Factor I: Liberal Democrats: A Lasting Legacy of Significant Policy Achievements

Factor I includes 13 persons, 12 at the positive end and one at the negative end. At the positive end, it is almost exclusively a liberal Democratic group who at the time of the study would have voted for either Sanders or Clinton. There is one female — the only one in the study — and the average age is 55. One has a J.D. and the rest have Ph.D.'s. They average 23 years of experience in their profession. At the negative end, the one

individual identifies himself as a moderate and independent, who is likely to vote for someone other than the regular candidates or not vote at all. He is one of the oldest, has extensive experience, and is a very respected scholar in the profession. Factor I correlates with factor II at .04, factor III at .39, and factor IV at .28. Numbers in brackets in the following discussion refer to the statement number followed by the score given to that particular statement by that factor on the scale from +5 to -5.

Recognizing “the power of inherited constraints on what a particular president can do,” factor I claims history will regard President Obama “as a figure of considerably greater historical significance than is recognized in the prevailing discourse of talking heads” (34 +5). As evidence of this, a litany of his accomplishments dominate this narrative. For example, he “passed the Affordable Health Care Act, turned the American automobile industry around, protected Social Security and Medicare . . . repealed ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,’ advanced the cause of same sex marriage, and don’t forget just how much worse things could have been if the Great Recession had followed the path of the Great Depression” (19 +5, 26 -5). He also is “truly passionate about climate change in a way that we haven’t fully grasped: tough EPA constraints on coal, a meaningful accord with China to cut emissions, serious stimulus spending on clean energy, new emissions standards for cars and trucks. History may well reveal that Obama showed more personal courage on this issue than any other” (20 +5). And his “efforts on behalf of women are one of the most commonly overlooked aspects of his presidency. From creating the White House Council on Women and Girls, to appointing two women to the Supreme Court, Janet Yellen to chair the Federal Reserve, and a strong team of women to his Cabinet and White House staff, he has taken steps to ensure that women’s voices are heard” (7 +4). In the future “(h)is reputation on domestic policy will improve considerably as the enduring significance of his accomplishments comes into clearer focus” (35 +4).

While not as central to his legacy as domestic affairs (29 0), foreign policy achievements are nonetheless regarded as a key component of his legacy. “His major achievement will be the reestablishment of a multilateral approach to foreign policy after the Bush-Cheney years of unilateralism, the improvement of our relationship with Western allies, the opening of diplomatic relations with Cuba, and the toning down of the fear-based hysteria about terrorism” (22 +3, 6 -3). And “(t)hankfully, he recognized that invading and occupying countries in the Islamic world is a dumb idea” (31 -3).

In addition to Obama’s policy accomplishments, key components of his legacy relate to issues of race and his character. While race issues were crucial to the generation of opposition to Obama and the polarized nature of commentary and debate (28+2, 9 +1), the fact that he was the “first black president will always remain fundamental to Obama’s historical significance” (5 +4). In addition, “Obama’s favorable legacy will be defined by the strength of his individual character . . . and his authenticity. He is a man of principle and strong convictions and truly believes as so many children of immigrants before him in the American Dream. As an Ivy-educated black man, devoted father and faithful husband, his achievements are kryptonite to the enduring strength of racial stereotypes” (39 +3).

The one person on the negative end of factor I obviously rejects much of this perspective. In particular they agree that “the most lasting symbolic image of the Obama presidency will be the missile-firing drone employed as an instrument of assassination” (10 -5). Coupled with this, “the most destructive legacy of the Obama presidency is the mainstreaming of the idea that if Congress ‘fails to act’ it’s okay for the president to figure out a way to make law himself” (40 -4). According to this narrative “he is not the



living embodiment of American Exceptionalism” (24 +2), has done little to reform entitlement (26 -5), nor done much on other domestic policies (19 +5, 20 +5). He has not been a very good political leader (4 -5), has not transcended race (23 -4), and didn’t do much on foreign affairs either (6 -3). In other words, the Obama legacy will be one of failure on just about all fronts.

### **Factor II: Moderate Republicans and the Dubious Obama Legacy**

Factor II consists of five persons, all Republicans, all at least leaning conservative, and four voting for Kasich with the fifth either voting for someone other than the major candidates or not voting at all. They are all male, all have a Ph.D., average 46 years of age and 18 years in their profession. Factor II correlates .04 with factor I, .40 with factor III, and .28 with factor IV. Not surprisingly, given its composition, and its correlation with factor I, the factor II perspective on the Obama legacy is quite distinct from factor I and somewhat negative, doubting that Obama will have the kind of legacy suggested by factor I.

In particular, factor II sees that a critical component of the Obama legacy will be his failure as a politician. Principally, he will “leave little legacy regarding the operation of the office he held and the party position he was to command. He might be regarded ultimately as a sort of Woodrow Wilson, a good-intentioned president, cerebral and moral, but a failure as a politician” (4 +5). Factor II acknowledges that Obama’s presidency was plagued by partisanship from the conservative opposition, “(b)ut part is also his personal failing. He turns out to have not been the politician some had hoped; he did not rise to the occasion like a Roosevelt or a Johnson” (30 +3). They also are willing to admit that “Obama will not be regarded as an unsuccessful president. His successes, however, are all pragmatic supplements to prior transformations rather than elements of a new and lasting political coalition or constitutional vision” (27 +3). The problem is “so-called transformative presidents forge lasting coalitions, shape a coherent and distinctive agenda of public policy, and rebuild institutions in ways that perpetuate their coalition and their policy agenda. Crucial to all of this is a public philosophy that gives meaning to the president’s political vision. Obama had no public philosophy, save a commitment to pragmatism — a kind of anti-public philosophy” (8 +2). These Republicans also reject the argument that Obama showed substantial political leadership when he couldn’t “get a budget passed or keep the federal government open” and as a result used “unilateral actions . . . to achieve . . . his ends” (18 -5).

While central to the Factor I perspective on the Obama legacy is the litany of accomplishments, particularly on the domestic front, factor II, with some minor exceptions, disagrees. According to factor II, “Obama has done nothing to reform entitlement spending . . .” (26 +5). They also do not believe that some of his signature policies like Obamacare, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” “same sex marriage,” and his handling “of the Great Recession,” will become important ingredients of a lasting legacy (19 -3). “The big story of the Obama legacy is grotesque inequality combined with the continuing stagnation of middle-class incomes . . . (O)ver the course of eight years in office, he did little to alleviate them. So while he may not be Herbert Hoover, he’s surely not FDR either” (3 +4). Likewise, factor II does not buy the argument that “Obama has had a significant impact on Federal Administrative agencies” (33 -2). Nor has he, as some claim, “put a giant roadblock in the rightward movement of the United States” (12 -4). And as to Obama’s legacy in the future, the idea that “his reputation on domestic

policy will improve considerably as the enduring significance of his accomplishments comes into clearer focus” is soundly rejected (35 –4).

In the area of foreign policy, factor II is disappointed in much of what Obama has done because he “failed to ‘brand’ his foreign policy. He has appeared halting and hesitant at times, such as after Syria’s use of chemical weapons or during the crisis in Ukraine. His essential pragmatism has meant that he has not developed a narrative for the place of the United States in global affairs. Whether by design or not, there is no Obama Doctrine” (29 +5). Likewise, they see that overall his “foreign policy has been incoherent and conceptless, especially toward Russia and China” (16 –3). As a result, foreign policy will not be an important part of any Obama legacy (22 –3, 2 –2). At the same time, they give him credit for recognizing that “(m)uscular foreign-policy actions make for headlines, but . . . avoiding serious mistakes, having a prudent sense of national-security priorities, as well as a sense of the fiscal, demographic, material, and political limits on this country’s scope for action in the international arena are” important virtues (25 +3).

Finally, factor II reluctantly acknowledges that conservative, partisan opposition (30 +3) and race (13 +4), at least to some degree, played roles in Obama’s ability to act. And, they are prepared to give him credit for his “efforts on behalf of women” (7+4). Similarly, they admit “(h)istorians will (not) judge the Obama administration harshly . . . for failing to reregulate the financial sector” (32 –4). Despite these accolades, overall factor II presents a critical narrative on the Obama legacy, quite distinct from that of factor I.

### **Factor III: Partisan Dissent: A Legacy of Scarce (and Missed) Opportunities**

Factor III is bipolar and consists of three persons, two on the positive end and one on the negative end. At the positive end there are two males, both with Ph. D.’s, with an average age of 64 and an average number of years of experience at 33. Both are Democrats and one labels himself very liberal and the other leaning conservative. Both would vote for Clinton. At the negative end is a 30-39-year-old male with two years’ experience who labels himself independent and moderate and indicates he will either not vote or vote for someone other than any of the major candidates. Factor III is correlated .39 with Factor I, .31 with factor II, and .16 with factor IV.

Similar to factor II, although more central to its perspective, factor III expresses disappointment with Obama, particularly as a politician. Factor III argues that Obama revealed a “lack of political realism” and leadership demonstrated repeatedly by “his quixotic attempt to compromise with the Republican leadership long after the tea party had turned any common ground into scorched earth” and “his reluctance to campaign with the necessary give-’em-hell Harry Truman aggressiveness for congressional Democrats” (21 +5). On these two politically vital matters — serving as Chief Lobbyist vis-à-vis obstructionist Republicans and acting as Party Leader — Obama simply failed to meet expectations. “He turns out to have not been the politician some had hoped and he did not rise to the occasion like a Roosevelt or a Johnson” (30 +5). As a result, “Obama will leave little legacy regarding the operation of the office he held” and “(h)e might be regarded ultimately as a sort of Woodrow Wilson, a good-intentioned president, cerebral and moral, but a failure as a politician” (4 +4). Apparently, the hope was for a “transformative president” who would “forge lasting coalitions, shape a coherent and distinctive agenda of public policy, and rebuild institutions in ways that perpetuate their coalition and their policy agenda.” To do this, however, requires a “public philosophy that gives meaning to the president’s political vision. Obama had no

public philosophy, save a commitment to pragmatism — a kind of anti-public philosophy” (8 +4).

The lack of such a philosophy has consequences for Obama’s foreign policy where “(h)is essential pragmatism . . . meant that he (has) not developed a narrative for the place of the United States in global affairs. Whether by design or not, there is no Obama Doctrine” (29 +3). It is not that Obama will be considered completely unsuccessful as president, but “(h)is successes. . . are all pragmatic supplements to prior transformations rather than elements of a new and lasting political coalition or constitutional vision” (27 0). Even Obamacare, his perhaps central achievement, “only reaffirmed, rather than transformed, the New Democrat tendency to look for market solutions when possible” (11 +3). The one exception to this pattern is that, while he has not articulated a clear “Obama Doctrine” in foreign affairs, in many respects at least he has not followed the pattern of his predecessor in foreign affairs (31– 5).

While disappointed in Obama, factor III is prepared to give him some credit, albeit substantially qualified. For example, Obama did make some progress in regulating the financial sector (32 –3). In addition, “as time passes” he will receive more credit “for saving the U.S. and global economy from a major crash and launching a robust and sustained economic recovery.” However, “(t)he question mark will remain how *equitable* the recovery proves to be” (17 +2). Similarly, “(f)uture historians will praise his calm and measured approach to foreign affairs and credit him with avoiding the catastrophic blunders that plagued the Bush administration. However, while he avoided disaster he did not leave the United States (or the world) in a substantially more secure position” (38 +2).

While considerable responsibility for a “failed presidency” is placed on Obama himself, factor III recognizes critical contextual dynamics that substantially limited Obama’s opportunity for success. Among those was race. While “Obama’s race was a huge factor in him getting the nomination in the first place, (it) was also a factor in mobilizing a portion . . . of the hostility he encountered from the right” (28 +1). “His blackness fueled the very demented nature of the opposition to him. Officials, who should have known better, have felt that liberties could be taken with him that could not be taken with a white man” (9 +5). In addition, factor III recognizes the limits placed on Obama as a result of oppositional forces. For example, while Obama has to “bear his portion of the blame,” the lack of entitlement reform is not entirely his fault (26 –5). He has been constrained “in part because of partisanship, his conservative opposition constantly obstructing and opposing because it played well to broad reaches of the electorate” (30 +5). And as presidential scholars, more so than contemporary “talking heads,” factor III is “more conscious than . . . other folks seem to be of one huge reality: the power of inherited constraints on what a particular president can do under the specific circumstances he or she may face” (34 +4).

As indicated, factor III is willing to give Obama some credit on his policy accomplishments as a part of his legacy. For example, “he is truly passionate about climate change in a way that we haven’t fully grasped: tough EPA constraints on coal, a meaningful accord with China to cut emissions, serious stimulus spending on clean energy, new emissions standards for cars and trucks. History may well reveal that Obama showed more personal courage on this issue than any other” (20 +3). Likewise, they don’t blame him for failure to reform social security (26 –5). However, virtually all of those policy accomplishments that factor I saw as a key component of the Obama legacy, are not included as central components of factor III’s narrative on the Obama legacy (33 0, 7 0, 19 0).

#### Factor IV: Sanders Inspired Progressive Dissent

Factor IV includes two males with Ph.D.'s and a mean age of 45. One reported 18 years of experience and the younger one did not respond to that question. Most importantly, they identify themselves as very liberal, strong Democrats, and Sanders' supporters. Factor IV is correlated .28 with Factor I, -.13 with Factor II, and .16 with Factor III. Overall, factor IV appears consistent with what one might expect from very liberal supporters of Bernie Sanders.

For factor IV, Obama's race played a significant role in his presidency and will be an important part of his legacy. For future generations, "first black president will always remain fundamental to Obama's historical significance, and the fact that his election put a black family at the center of American public life will remain a major aspect of his presidency" (5 +5). As the "first black president" expectations were thrust upon him to address problems with race relations which, from their perspective, he did, (23 -3) and he began to prepare the country "for its future as a genuinely multicultural society" (1 +4). However, while his symbolic position, efforts, and accomplishments have impacted race relations to some extent, "(w)e have discovered that we can elect an individual who happens to be black," but we cannot entirely "address the continuing problem of race in America" (13 +3, 15 0). And in Obama's case, whatever progress we have made, did not protect him (39 -4), and as a result, he felt the sting of racism. "His blackness fueled the very demented nature of the opposition to him" (9 +5) and was a "factor mobilizing a part . . . of the hostility he encountered from the right" (28 0).

Where factor IV sees deficiencies in the Obama legacy is when they evaluate his record and the policies he did and did not support. They admit that history eventually might be relatively kind to Obama on some issues "as the enduring significance of his accomplishments comes into clearer focus" (35 +3). And they believe Obama will get much more credit as time passes for saving the U.S. and global economy from a major crash" (17 +5). In addition, although somewhat reluctantly, they appreciate his efforts on behalf of climate change (20 +1) and protecting entitlement spending" (26 -2). Yet clearly outweighing these actions, the real legacy of the Obama presidency on policy is that he did little to alleviate the "grotesque inequality" and the "stagnation of middle-class incomes" (3 -1, 17 +5). Likewise, Obamacare did not go far enough towards providing universal health care coverage and simply "reaffirmed, rather than transformed, the New Democrat tendency to look for market solutions when possible" (11 +4). On top of that, Obama failed to "reregulate the financial sector" (32 +4) and he certainly did not "put a giant roadblock in the rightward movement of the United States" (12 -5). Nor are they willing to give him much credit for his impact on Federal Administrative agencies like the Department of Justice (33 -1) and his impact on "ensuring that women's voices are heard" (7 0). While Obama did well on a few issues, he simply was not progressive enough and did not go far enough for factor IV. In most instances, he was too much like his predecessors (31 +1), too pragmatic (8 +1, 27 0), and was more about continuity than change (14 +3).

Factor IV gives Obama more, although somewhat unenthusiastic, credit for what he has done in foreign affairs, suggesting that there is at least some "coherence" in his approach and that he has made some progress with the problems he inherited (6 -5, 29 -4, 16 -2). "His major achievement will be the reestablishment of a multilateral approach to foreign policy after the Bush-Cheney years of unilateralism" (22 +2), and his recognition "that invading and occupying countries in the Islamic world is a dumb idea" (31 +1). There also is a general over all appreciation for his decision-making style in foreign affairs recognizing that "(m)uscular foreign-policy actions make for headlines,

but . . . avoiding serious mistakes, having a prudent sense of national-security priorities, as well as a sense of the fiscal, demographic, material, and political limits on this country's scope for action in the international arena are large virtues, too often underappreciated" (25 +2). At the same time, factor IV is not pleased with some of the tactics of Obama's foreign policy. While he has avoided the mistakes of the Bush administration he "has simply taken a different approach, preferring missile-firing drones and Special Operations forces to 'boots on the ground.' In this sense, he is much like his predecessor" (31 +1). Furthermore, they are not pleased that we have essentially become a rogue state as a result of the belief that the president has the right "to kill anyone, anywhere in the world, without due process" (36 +2).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

We began this study by adopting the perspective of Murray Edelman (1988) who suggests that politics be examined as spectacle. From this perspective we can best comprehend politics by focusing on the range of meanings and understandings which exist about political events. In the case of early, academic constructions, different narratives — six if you include the bipolar ends of two factors — on the Obama legacy emerged. The number of respondents limits the ability to generalize to all academics, but in Q the focus is on generalizing about the perspectives that emerge and not generalizing to the larger population. Other narratives may exist, but these are specific narratives that do exist at this point in time. These four perspectives include:

Factor I — Liberal Democrats: A Lasting Legacy of Significant Policy Achievements — includes primarily liberal Democrats who were going to vote for either Sanders or Clinton. Because 12 of the 26 respondents load significantly on the positive end of this factor, at this point in time, it is clearly the dominant perspective among this group. Overall, it is a very positive view of what are considered the many accomplishments of the Obama administration, including Obamacare and rescuing us from the worst recession since the Great Depression. All this was accomplished despite the baggage he inherited and the polarizing hostility generated because of his race and the partisan opposition. According to factor I, the Obama legacy will only get better as the impact of his actions are realized.

Factor II — Moderate Republicans and the Dubious Obama Legacy — is the moderate Republican take on the Obama legacy. The overall theme is that Obama was a failure as a political leader and his accomplishments on both the domestic and international spheres were either minimal or nonexistent. Obama receives some credit, albeit grudgingly, for not making some of the same mistakes as the Bush administration on foreign policy. They also recognize to some extent that the partisan opposition did hamper him to some degree, but in the final analysis, much of Obama's problems had to do with his general ineffectiveness as a political leader.

Factor III — Partisan Dissent: A Legacy of Scarce (and Missed) Opportunities — seems to be the perspective of "disgruntled" Democrats who were very disappointed with Obama's political, party, and policy performance. They expected much more from him, and from their perspective he lacked the type of political aggressiveness that they thought he could have used to accomplish more. They do give him credit for some of his accomplishments and clearly recognize the limits created by the partisan opposition. However, they still hoped he would have taken greater advantage of the opportunities that were available to him.

Factor IV — Sanders Inspired Progressive Dissent — seems to be another "Democratic" response to the Obama Presidency. The two persons on this factor are

liberal Democrats and Sanders supporters. According to factor IV a critical, if not the most important component of Obama legacy, is the issue of race. Not only because he was our “first black president,” but also because of his efforts to deal with the issue and the animosity towards him because of his race. At the same time, as one might expect from Sanders’ supporters, they believe Obama simply did not go far enough in moving domestic policy in a more progressive direction.

The results presented here allow us to return to the question raised earlier about partisan bias by academics in presidential rankings. The data here support the position by John Sides (2011) and others (Felzenberg 2003; Rudalevige 2015; Uscinski and Simon 2003;) who argue that there is a partisan bias in presidential rankings by academics, and despite efforts to be objective as Fred Greenstein (1983) suggests, academics seem to be influenced by some of the same factors as the general public. Clearly, factor I (the Democrats) and factor II (the Republicans) split along party lines representing very different perspectives as one might expect given their party preferences. The existence of factors III and IV however, supports the position of Blessing (2011) and Curt Nichols (2012) among others, who suggest there are other variables involved than simply partisan differences. While only a limited number of academics load on factors III and IV, those on the positive end are all Democrats and these factors represent different narratives about the Obama legacy than factor I which seems to be the primary Democratic perspective on the Obama legacy. Thus, more than simply partisanship appears to divide academics and it is likely that at least ideology, policy success, political time, academic training, and context may be factors creating these divisions (Curry and Morris, 2010; Nichols, 2012; Rottinghaus and Vaughn, 2018). It should also be added that factor’s I and III are bipolar indicating even greater diversity among these presidential scholars.

Finally, the results here suggest the stage is set for the “Darwinian struggle” to define the Obama legacy. As Blessing (2011) suggests, while the president is still in office there is likely to emerge multiple understandings of the president’s legacy. These early narratives will then do battle overtime to see which, if any one of them, reigns supreme. Presidential scholars note both continuity and volatility in a president’s ranking (Pfiffner, 2003), but consensus on a president’s legacy is more likely to emerge for presidents considered to be “great” or “failures.” While there is disagreement, some (Grendstad, 2008; Murray and Blessing, 1983) argue that when a president is considered “near great” or “average” or “near failure,” there is likely to be much greater disagreement and more separate and distinct narratives on their legacy. Given the studies considered earlier, Obama is at best predicted to be in the “near great” or “average” category and therefore, it is likely that we can look forward to continued widespread disagreement among academics on his legacy. Douglas Lonnstrom and Thomas Kelly (2003) go so far as to suggest it may take as many as 40 years before a president’s ranking on the “greatness” scale stabilizes. In addition, given current, partisan polarization and Trump’s efforts to reverse most of Obama’s accomplishments, multiple, partisan narratives on the Obama legacy are likely to continue.

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## Appendix

Statements	Factors			
	I	II	III	IV
1. Obama prepared the country for its future as a genuinely multicultural society. People of color will soon outnumber white Americans, religious diversity continues to grow, and differences in sexual orientation are increasingly accepted. Obama’s presidency may one day be seen as a watershed in the construction of a genuinely “rainbow” America.	-1	-1	-2	4
2. Obama will be judged a success for stopping the hemorrhaging, trying to extract America from these disasters of our own making, and for bringing some modesty to American projections of force. He realized that the age of American unilateralism was over.	2	-2	1	-1
3. The big story of the Obama legacy is grotesque inequality combined with the continuing stagnation of middle-class incomes. Obama did not create these problems. He merely inherited them. Yet over the course of eight years in office, he did little to alleviate them. So while he may not be Herbert Hoover, he’s surely not FDR either.	-2	4	-2	-1
4. Obama will leave little legacy regarding the operation of the office he held and the party position he was to command. He might be regarded ultimately as a sort of Woodrow Wilson, a good-intentioned president, cerebral and moral, but a failure as a politician.	-5	5	4	-5
5. Racism is such a central feature of American history that “first black president” will always remain fundamental to Obama’s historical significance, and the fact that his election put a black family at the center of American public life will remain a major aspect of his presidency.	4	2	1	5
6. Obama promised a responsible end to the Iraq War, victory in Afghanistan, a fresh start on relations with the Islamic world, an end to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, a “reset” with Russia, and a “pivot” toward Asia that would somehow ease American nervousness about a rising China. Thus far he’s hitless in six at bats.	-3	0	-4	-5
7. President Obama’s efforts on behalf of women are one of the most commonly overlooked aspects of his presidency. From creating the White House Council on Women and Girls, to appointing two women to the Supreme Court, Janet Yellen to chair the Federal Reserve, and a strong team of women to his Cabinet and White House staff, he has taken steps to ensure that women’s voices are heard.	4	4	0	0
8. So-called transformative presidents forge lasting coalitions, shape a coherent and distinctive agenda of public policy, and rebuild institutions in ways that perpetuate their coalition and their policy agenda. Crucial to all of this is a public philosophy that gives meaning to the president’s political vision. Obama had no public philosophy, save a commitment to pragmatism — a kind of anti-public philosophy.	-1	2	4	1

Statements	Factors			
	I	II	III	IV
9. His blackness fueled the very demented nature of the opposition to him. Officials, who should have known better, have felt that liberties could be taken with him that could not be taken with a white man. The examples are well known— Republican Joe Wilson yelling out that he was a liar and the governor wagging her finger in his face as if he were some errant child that she had control over.	1	-2	5	5
10. The most lasting symbolic image of the Obama presidency will be the missile-firing drone employed as an instrument of assassination.	-5	-5	-3	0
11. Obamacare itself will not produce universal coverage, continues to be dogged by legal challenges, and most notably, only reaffirmed, rather than transformed, the New Democrat tendency to look for market solutions when possible.	-2	2	3	4
12. Obama has put a giant roadblock in the rightward movement of the United States.	0	-4	-3	-5
13. We have discovered that we can elect an individual who happens to be black, but we cannot address the continuing problem of race in America. Although few people speak publicly about race, Obama’s race has been a major factor in polarizing American politics.	1	4	2	3
14. Obama’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech made clear that he was as committed as his predecessors to the myth of American exceptionalism—the notion that the United States had a unique (perhaps divinely ordained) responsibility for world leadership. And the exceptionalist faith has been the main ideological justification for military intervention abroad. With a few faint and fitful exceptions, the Obama administration has been all about continuity, not change.	-1	-2	-2	3
15. For some Americans, Obama’s presidency will continue to validate “post-racial” assumptions and attitudes: They will take Obama’s presidency as evidence that America’s racial problems are mostly in the past. For others, the fact that Obama was able to do relatively little to redress racial inequality will highlight the enduring structural and institutionalized character of American racial inequality.	1	0	2	0
16. The one noble moment was the administration’s support for the Arab Spring. Otherwise, Obama foreign policy has been incoherent and conceptless, especially toward Russia and China. The White House pressed the snooze button on nuclear-arms reduction while feigning at a new Cold War.	-4	-3	-4	-2

Statements	Factors			
	I	II	III	IV
17. Obama will get much more credit as time passes for saving the U.S. and global economy from a major crash and launching a robust and sustained economic recovery. The question mark will remain how equitable the recovery proves to be.	3	1	2	5
18. Obama acted to strengthen an office that was trending weaker. His unilateral actions were an institutionally necessary response to a dysfunctional political situation that was rendering the presidency powerless. When a president cannot even get a budget passed or keep the federal government open, he must turn to unilateral actions if he is to achieve any of his ends.	0	-5	-1	-2
19. President Obama passed the Affordable Health Care Act, turned the American automobile industry around, protected Social Security and Medicare against what could have been severe cuts or damaging privatization, repealed “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” advanced the cause of same sex marriage, and don’t forget just how much worse things could have been if the Great Recession had followed the path of the Great Depression.	5	-3	0	2
20. President Obama’s actions suggest that he is truly passionate about climate change in a way that we haven’t fully grasped: tough EPA constraints on coal, a meaningful accord with China to cut emissions, serious stimulus spending on clean energy, new emissions standards for cars and trucks. History may well reveal that Obama showed more personal courage on this issue than any other.	5	0	3	1
21. Future historians will be puzzled by Obama’s lack of political realism—for example, his quixotic attempt to compromise with the Republican leadership long after the tea party had turned any common ground into scorched earth. Or, conversely, his reluctance to campaign with the necessary give-’em-hell Harry Truman aggressiveness for congressional Democrats.	0	-1	5	1
22. His major achievement will be the reestablishment of a multilateral approach to foreign policy after the Bush-Cheney years of unilateralism, the improvement of our relationship with Western allies, the opening of diplomatic relations with Cuba, and the toning down of the fear-based hysteria about terrorism.	3	-3	-2	2
23. He has not come close to transcending race as most Americans expected. Obama introduced himself as a uniter, but now we see him speaking at events sponsored by the race-hustling Reverend Al Sharpton. Obama never accepted, though he often borrowed, Martin Luther King Jr.’s view of the non-racist quality of America’s founding principles.	-4	-1	-4	-3

Statements	Factors			
	I	II	III	IV
24. He is a living embodiment of American exceptionalism, of the capacity of any individual, in a free nation, to aspire to the zenith of success and achieve it by dint of hard work and ambition. He is everything Lincoln, FDR, and LBJ could have imagined as the prized harvest of the seeds they sowed.	2	2	0	-4
25. Muscular foreign-policy actions make for headlines, but as with Obama, avoiding serious mistakes, having a prudent sense of national-security priorities, as well as a sense of the fiscal, demographic, material, and political limits on this country's scope for action in the international arena are large virtues, too often underappreciated.	2	3	-2	2
26. Obama has done nothing to reform entitlement spending, which most experts agree to be based on outdated demographic and economic assumptions. Without significant changes, Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid will go broke in a matter of decades. If that happens, Obama will bear his portion of the blame.	-5	5	-5	-2
27. Obama will not be regarded as an unsuccessful president. His successes, however, are all pragmatic supplements to prior transformations rather than elements of a new and lasting political coalition or constitutional vision.	0	3	0	0
28. Obama's race was a huge factor in him getting the nomination in the first place, but was also a factor in mobilizing a portion (but far from all) of the hostility he encountered from the right. This is not to say that people were overtly or consciously racist (though some of course were). But the forms that the opposition rhetoric took—gripes about handouts for the undeserving—were shaped by racial stereotypes and prejudice.	2	1	1	0
29. Obama failed to "brand" his foreign policy. He has appeared halting and hesitant at times, such as after Syria's use of chemical weapons or during the crisis in Ukraine. His essential pragmatism has meant that he has not developed a narrative for the place of the United States in global affairs. Whether by design or not, there is no Obama Doctrine.	0	5	3	-4
30. Obama has been a disappointment in part because of partisanship, his conservative opposition constantly obstructing and opposing because it played well to broad reaches of the electorate. But part is also his personal failing. He turns out to have not been the politician some had hoped; he did not rise to the occasion like a Roosevelt or a Johnson.	-3	3	5	-3

Statements	Factors			
	I	II	III	IV
31. Thankfully, Obama recognized that invading and occupying countries in the Islamic world is a dumb idea. But he has simply taken a different approach, preferring missile-firing drones and Special Operations forces to “boots on the ground.” In this sense he is much like his predecessor.	-3	0	-5	1
32. Historians will judge the Obama administration harshly—and rightly so—for failing to reregulate the financial sector.	-3	-4	-3	4
33. Obama has had a significant impact on Federal Administrative agencies. The Department of Justice had arguably never been as partisan as it was during the Bush years. Obama professionalized the hiring process and reinvigorated many of the DOJ’s divisions. A similar process has played out in the Department of Housing and Urban Development.	0	-2	0	-1
34. There is a sound basis for regarding him as a figure of considerably greater historical significance than is recognized in the prevailing discourse of talking heads. Historians are much more conscious than lots of other folks seem to be of one huge reality: the power of inherited constraints on what a particular president can do under the specific circumstances he or she may face.	5	0	4	-1
35. His reputation on domestic policy will improve considerably as the enduring significance of his accomplishments comes into clearer focus: the comparative success of the U.S. response to the Great Recession, the Affordable Care Act, stronger environmental regulations, and perhaps some long-range investments made via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.	4	-4	0	3
36. The assumption of the right of the U.S. president to kill anyone, anywhere in the world, without due process is an abomination and suggests a government that still regards itself as above and beyond the law: the definition of a rogue state.	-2	-5	-2	2
37. If the Affordable Care Act works (and it’s too soon to tell), it will be the most significant extension of the welfare state in half a century. If it doesn’t, it will be the last nail in the coffin of the Great Society, discrediting any major social programs in the future	-1	1	-2	-2
38. Future historians will praise his calm and measured approach to foreign affairs and credit him with avoiding the catastrophic blunders that plagued the Bush administration. However, while he avoided disaster he did not leave the United States (or the world) in a substantially more secure position.	1	1	2	0

Statements	Factors			
	I	II	III	IV
39. Obama's favorable legacy will be defined by the strength of his individual character, his exceptional personal biography, and his authenticity. He is a man of principle and strong convictions and truly believes as so many children of immigrants before him in the American Dream. As an Ivy-educated black man, devoted father and faithful husband, his achievements are kryptonite to the enduring strength of racial stereotypes	3	-1	0	-4
40. The most destructive legacy of the Obama presidency is the mainstreaming of the idea that if Congress "fails to act" it's okay for the president to figure out a way to make law himself.	-4	0	-5	-3