

## EXERCISE SET 7 - 1

In the run-up to the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama gave a speech, “A More Perfect Union,” hailed by many people as one of the most important speeches on race and the American experience since those given by Martin Luther King. Evaluate this excerpt and explain why it might be effective, persuasive rhetoric. Consider the language (positive and negative), tone, examples, repetitions of words and phrases, choice of pronouns, and anything else you can think of. Conclude with a discussion of the worldview it reflects.

*[W]e have a choice in this country. We can accept a politics that breeds division, and conflict, and cynicism. We can tackle race only as spectacle—as we did in the O.J. trial—or in the wake of tragedy, as we did in the aftermath of Katrina—or as fodder for the nightly news. . . . We can pounce on some gaffe by Hillary Clinton as evidence that she’s playing the race card, or we can speculate on whether white men will all flock to John McCain in the general election regardless of his policies. We can do that.*

*But if we do, I can tell you that in the next election, we’ll be talking about some other distraction. And then another one. . . . And nothing will change.*

*That is one option. Or, at this moment in the election, we can come together and say, “Not this time.” This time we want to talk about the crumbling schools that are stealing the future of black children and white children and Asian children and Hispanic children and Native American children. This time we want to reject the cynicism that tells us that these kids can’t learn: that these kids who don’t look like us are somebody else’s problem. The children of America are not those kids, they are our kids, and we will not let them fall behind in a 21st century economy. Not this time.*

*This time we want to talk about how the lines in the emergency room are filled with whites and blacks and Hispanics who do not have health care, who don’t have the power on their own to overcome the special interests in Washington, but who can take them on if we do it together.*

*This time we want to talk about the shuttered mills that once provided a decent life for men and women of every race. . . . This time we want to talk about the fact that the real problem is not that someone who doesn’t look like you might take your job; it’s that the corporation you work for will ship it overseas for nothing more than a profit. . . .*

*I would not be running for president if I didn’t believe with all my heart that this is what the vast majority of Americans want for the country. This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected. And today, whenever I find myself feeling doubtful or cynical about this possibility, what gives me the most hope is the next generation—the young people whose attitudes and beliefs and openness to change have already made history in this election.*