



BARACK OBAMA is often cited as America's first black president. While his father is Negro, his mother is Caucasian – doesn't that make him America's first multi-racial president?

To both support and derision, the 2010 U.S. Census re-inserted the term "Negro" (dropped decades ago) adjacent to "black" and "African American" as racial labels. Selecting "some other race" and writing in a term is also an option. Citizens can also check more than one race term.

Because there's no specific gene for race, much of America's definition of race is strongly related to socio-cultural, geographic and economic factors, and is manifest in entrenched class and identity distinctions. Notions of race are socially constructed and continuously evolving.

The term 'Oreo' has been used pejoratively to describe African-Americans with mainstream white social and cultural values – black on the outside, white on the inside. A *New York Times* columnist wrote this about Obama's identity: "he was raised white. He chose black."¹

The so-called 'one drop rule,' which advocates *hypodescent* (the assigning of racial labels based on the parent of lower social status, regardless of the percentage of racial mix), was still very much in place when Barack Obama was born. The 'birther' movement, a thinly veiled form of racism posing as concern over Obama's citizenship, shows that this type of discrimination still exists.

Perhaps the ongoing debates about race in America will be eclipsed by President Obama's character, vision and actions – in other words, his humanity. For this, he should be known not as the first black president, or as the first mixed-race president, but as the country's first post-race president.

1. Cohen, R. (2 June 2011) "A White Woman From Kansas" essay in *The New York Times*.
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/03/opinion/03iht-edcohen03.html?_r=1&emc=eta1