



CHANGING THE RACE

**Racial Politics and the
Election of Barack Obama**

Applied Research Center

Linda Burnham, Editor



APPLIED RESEARCH CENTER
Advancing Racial Justice Through Research, Advocacy and Journalism



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Preface

The 2008 presidential election was one of the most contentious, surprising and memorable elections in recent times. Just a few years earlier, few could have predicted the outcome—the historic election of our nation’s first Black president.

The 2008 election season will have significant bearing on future campaigns for many reasons:

- The candidacies of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin will certainly further open the doors for future women candidates and candidates of color.
- New web-based technologies and social media factored prominently in attracting campaign donors, engaging volunteers and “net-roots” activists, and sharing campaign-content, much of it user-generated.
- The changing demographics of the country—particularly the expanding numbers and influence of Latino voters along with a growing bloc of energized young voters—is rapidly reshaping the electorate and the entire political landscape.
- Racial dynamics also played a prominent role as Obama increasingly took center stage.

The campaign surfaced all kinds of questions about race that the writers of this volume address.

Was the nation ready for a President of color? Would whites vote for a Black man? Would Latinos? Would Obama only—or even—appeal to Black voters?

Was it more important to vote on the basis of race, gender, or neither?

Could the solid red-state South and the old racist “Southern Strategy” be cracked? How was racially loaded and coded language—and exploiting racial divisions—still being used to evoke voters’ racial biases and fears?

Was structural racism—the historic and institutional exclusion and disenfranchisement of people of color, such as voter suppression—still playing out in the electoral arena?

Were traditional Black politics and civil rights leadership losing their relevance? Why did the candidates hardly mention racial disparities or address racial equity in their policy proposals?

How would the nation’s changing demographics—with increasing immigrant populations and voters of color—affect the national election?

Did Obama’s election usher in a new “post-racial” era?

In hindsight, we now know the answers to some of these questions. But others are hardly resolved. Many have yet to be explicitly and constructively addressed.



The prominence and complexities of these racial dynamics compels us to interrogate them further. One thing is clear: on election night, racism did not disappear with the election of one man of color.

Indeed, an Obama presidency may be a most important cultural symbol of racial progress. But on the ground, people are still waiting and working for change.

Race is a defining factor in the way our society is structured and in the way our elections and politics are contested. Our racial inequities are wide and deep, yet our solutions are few and far between. Indeed, much progress has been made since the Civil Rights movement, but much ground has also been lost. The popular notion of racism as personal prejudice ignores the historic and systemic inequities that continue to produce everyday benefits and burdens based on race.

To be sure, race and racism will continue to shape elections to come.

That's why we decided to engage a diverse set of progressive thinkers and activists in analyzing the complexities of how race played out in the presidential race. We wanted these writers, among the most prominent of their time, to identify the trends, the lessons, the facts and the lies; to consider barriers and continuing challenges, as well as opportunities to advance racial equity and social inclusion for all our nation's residents.

We are very pleased to present this collection of commentaries by an impressive set of authors, each contributing an essay on a different dimension of the racial puzzle. Collectively, they provide a wealth of insight.

We have also included a study guide at the end of each essay to provide readers an opportunity for further reflection, analysis, discussion or research.

We want to thank Linda Burnham for bringing her sharp insight and skill as editor of this collection. Linda provided the vision, conceptualization and legwork to assemble this outstanding array of authors.

Many thanks also to Frances M. Beal and Ilyana Achziger for their assistance in developing the study guide that accompanies each of the essays. Thanks to Hatty Lee for the design and to Susan Starr for copyediting. And thanks to Tammy Johnson and Dominique Apollon for reviewing draft essays. Lastly we are truly grateful for the 20 contributing authors whose individual and collective voices have so much to teach us.

Rinku Sen and Terry Keleher
Applied Research Center
Fall 2009

INTRODUCTION

Race and the Election of Barack Obama

By Linda Burnham

I was not a disinterested observer of the 2008 election. I spent time door knocking in east, west and downtown Oakland for Barack Obama. I attended rallies, house meetings and fundraisers. I burned through my cell phone minutes calling Nevada and New Mexico. I rocked out with my fellow citizens on the streets in front of Everett and Jones barbecue joint on election night.

Not only was I desperate, truly desperate, for an end to the highhanded lunacies of neo-conservative rule, I was also ready—beyond ready—to be done with racial exclusivity in the executive branch.

Flash back to the summer of 2006. I'm flipping through the pages of a *Men's Vogue* magazine profiling Obama. He's on the cover in a sky-blue tie, and there's a full spread of Obama family photos inside. Unusual treatment for a Black politico. A Chicago friend sits nearby. Me: "What's this all about?" He: "That's the next president of the United States." I think to myself, "You're one crazy white guy." I say to him, gently but firmly, "Not in our lifetime."

He should have bet me. Not that he could have won anything off me, but he—a close observer of national politics in general and Illinois politics in particular—was sure he was right, and I—a close observer of national politics in general and race politics in particular—was absolutely positive that a Black man could not get elected to the presidency of these United States.

Flash forward to January 21, 2009, and I'm traipsing through the shops in Union Station with my daughter, both of us deeply disappointed that they've run out of the Barack Obama presidential hot sauce we had intended to take home as a memento of the frigid but inspiring Jumbotron inauguration.

So I was not a neutral observer, but few were during the most highly charged political campaign in memory.

The campaign, victory and inauguration of Barack Obama surfaced a million conversations about race. And those conversations were suffused with a million stratagems and emotions—avoidance and attraction, misunderstanding, misrepresentation, courage, indirection, intelligence, purposeful obfuscation, guilt, patience, hostility, memory, battle fatigue and perseverance. Ancient, modern and post-modern tropes and narratives about race, color, class and belonging played to a national audience.

In this volume, we listen in on a few of those conversations. We hear from journalists, activists,



organizers and scholars. Some capture the immediacy of door-to-door campaigning. Others reveal the political trends still shaped by racially biased institutions and practices embedded in the legalized white supremacy of the past. Several explore the demographics of Obama's win and consider the potential effects of demographic shifts in the electorate over the longer term. Some contributors monitor the intersections of race with immigration, gender and foreign policy. Others examine the peculiarities of the politics of race at the level of the neighborhood, the city and county, state, region and nation. Each contributor reflects on how the Obama campaign revealed deeper truths and trends about our racially encoded nation.

Of course the Obama win contains a host of racial complexities and contradictory currents. It could hardly be otherwise.

Freighted with symbolism and the weight of history, the Obama victory was seen by some as the fulfillment of the promise of democracy; by others as the redemption note on centuries of struggle; and by others still as the logical culmination of long-curve social, political and economic trends. For nearly all those dedicated to ending racism, Election Day was a day of jubilation.

While it is tempting to wrap the campaign, the victory and the presidency in layer upon layer of social significance, Obama is one man. Meaningful as his achievement is, it is no substitute for racial justice. The rising of Obama is not the rising of the race.

In fact, while Obama's victory was built on the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, his presidency does not resolve—and probably complicates—the problem of crafting an effective racial justice strategy in the post-Civil Rights era.

Obama has been welcomed worldwide by leaders and peoples who shared in the satisfaction of witnessing a racial barrier overcome and who are genuinely relieved that, after so many years of tragic aggression, the U.S. has finally fielded a president who has tools

in his kit besides arrogance, ignorance and military might. But a brown face with a broad and ready smile can hardly mask the U.S. commitment to empire, a deeply engrained investment in militarism and a racially retrograde Euro-American global dominance.

The economic crisis at hand will continue to have disproportionate impact on communities of color, as has each recession and depression of the past. And unless there is a commitment to dismantling the structural and institutional supports for racial inequity; to directly addressing the vulnerabilities lurking at the intersections of race, poverty, gender and citizenship status; and to punishing parasitic and reckless greed, we will eventually exit the crisis having widened rather than narrowed the economic disparities that are, and always have been, a hallmark of racism.

This is not Obama's work alone. It cannot be done without the intervention of an aroused and persistent racial justice movement. Nor can the damage of the neo-conservative decades be undone in one or two terms. But, despite the complex and contradictory character of the Obama presidency, we are on a new, and far more favorable, playing field.

The struggle for political participation and representation has been long and brutal, and—Obama's presidency notwithstanding—it is far from finished. But something large has indeed shifted.

The presidential mold that could only contain white men has been broken.

Someday, there will be a woman president. An Asian American, a Latina/o, a Native American will someday sit in the Oval Office.

Someday, there will be an openly gay president.

There will be another Black president.

The Christian monopoly on the White House will be broken, and, someday, a Muslim or a Jew, a Buddhist, an agnostic or an atheist will lead the nation.

The way has been opened, and generations to come may well wonder what all the fuss was about.

Author Profiles

CHIP BERLET, senior analyst at Political Research Associates, has spent over 25 years studying prejudice, demonization, scapegoating, demagoguery, conspiracism and authoritarianism. He has investigated far-right hate groups, reactionary backlash movements, theocratic fundamentalism, civil liberties violations, police misconduct, government and private surveillance abuse, and other anti-democratic phenomena. Berlet is co-author of *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* and editor of *Eyes Right!: Challenging the Right Wing Backlash*, both of which received a Gustavus Myers Center Award for outstanding scholarship on the subject of human rights and intolerance in North America. He is on the advisory boards of the Defending Dissent Foundation, the journal *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion* and PRA's *Public Eye* magazine.

WILLIAM H. BOONE is Dean of Graduate Studies and Associate Professor of Political Science at Clark Atlanta University and former chair of its Department of Political Science. Boone is also on the faculty of the Africana Women's Center and has served as a lecturer at the Georgia Institute of Technology. He has authored or co-authored publications in the areas of Black political parties, state legislative activities, energy policies and the social, political and economic impact of governmental actions on rural communities. He has also been an expert witness in federal civil rights and voting rights cases. Boone has served as president of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists and is currently producer, writer and host of the cable TV series *Politically Speaking*. He is a graduate of Morgan State University and received his Ph.D. in political science from Atlanta University.

ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN is the executive director of The Ruckus Society, which brings nonviolent direct action training and action support to communities impacted by economic, environmental and social oppression. She sits on the board of Allied Media Projects and the advisory board of the Center for Media Justice, and facilitates the development of organizations throughout the movement, including New Orleans Parents Organizing Network, ColorofChange.org and Detroit Summer. A cofounder of the League of Young Voters and graduate of the Art of Leadership

and Art of Change yearlong trainings, she is obsessed with learning and developing models for action, community strength and movement building.

LINDA BURNHAM is cofounder of the Women of Color Resource Center and was its executive director for 18 years. Burnham has been working on racial justice and peace issues since the 1960s and on women-of-color issues since the early 1970s. She was a leader in the Third World Women's Alliance, a national organization that was an early advocate for the rights of women of color. Burnham has published numerous articles on Black women, Black politics and feminist theory in a wide range of periodicals and anthologies. In 2004, Burnham was a leader of Count Every Vote, a human rights project that trained citizens to monitor the polls for the presidential election in the southern states. A frequent featured speaker on college campuses and to community groups, Burnham's writing and organizing are part of a lifelong inquiry into the dynamic, often perilous intersections of race, class and gender.

JEFF CHANG is a 2008 USA Ford Fellow in Literature and a winner of the 2008 North Star News Prize. His first book, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of The Hip-Hop Generation*, garnered both the American Book Award and the Asian American Literary Award. Chang edited the acclaimed anthology *Total Chaos: The Art & Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*. He was a founding editor of *ColorLines* magazine and a senior editor/director at Russell Simmons's 360hiphop.com. He has written for *URB*, *Bomb Hip-Hop*, the *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Vibe*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Nation* and *Mother Jones*, among many other publications. In 1993, he cofounded and ran the influential hip-hop indie label SoleSides, now Quantum Projects, helping to launch the careers of DJ Shadow, Blackalicious, Lyrics Born and Lateef the Truth Speaker. Chang has worked as a community, labor and student organizer, and as a lobbyist for the students of the California State University system; was an organizer of the inaugural National Hip-Hop Political Convention; and has served as a board member for several organizations working for change through youth and community organizing, media justice, culture, the arts and hip-hop activism.



CAMILLE CYPRIAN is a community organizer, activist, artist and leader in several youth organizations and campaigns. She is the training organizer for Campus Camp Wellstone, the student and youth training arm of Wellstone Action. Cyprian is also involved with the Twin Cities' League of Young Voters—having served as the regional coordinator during the 2008 election cycle—the Twin Cities Green Jobs movement and Urban Embassy, an organization focusing on Black civic engagement and leadership.

KEITH JENNINGS is the president and founder of the African American Human Rights Foundation, a United States-based organization dedicated to the promotion of international human rights standards and especially concerned with economic, social and cultural rights. Jennings has served as a global expert on programs to strengthen the participation of civic groups and citizens in the political process. He has promoted good governance programs in Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, East Timor, Egypt, Haiti, Guyana, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Lesotho, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Slovakia, Thailand, Zimbabwe, Indonesia and Zambia. Jennings is an adjunct professor at Clark Atlanta University and a senior associate at the CAU Center for Citizen Participation focusing on Black Politics in the Southern United States. Jennings was the national coordinator of the World Council of Churches' human rights campaign on racism in the United States. He has held numerous other positions at organizations including Amnesty International USA, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Children's Defense Fund, National Rainbow Coalition, the American Friends Service Committee, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, NAACP National Voter Fund and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionist. Jennings holds a Ph.D. in Political Science and International Relations.

TAMMY JOHNSON, the Director of Strategic Partnerships at the Applied Research Center (ARC) has many years experience as a community organizer, trainer and writer versed in race and public policy. Inspired by her family's dedication to the struggle for civil rights, Johnson cut her activist teeth as president of the Black Student Union at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and as president of the Wisconsin Statewide Student Association. A

Tennessee native, Johnson lived for many years in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she was Coalition Organizer for Wisconsin Citizen Action, Director of Progressive Milwaukee, and Board Member of the Wisconsin Community Fund.

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CLARENCE LUSANE is an associate professor of political science in the School of International Service at American University, where he teaches and researches on international human rights, comparative race relations, social movements and electoral politics. He is also an author, activist, scholar, lecturer and journalist. For more than 30 years, he has written about and been active in national and international anti-racism politics, globalization, U.S. foreign policy, human rights and social issues such as education and drug policy. His most recent book is *Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice: Foreign Policy, Race, and the New American Century*. Other books include *Hitler's Black Victims: The Experiences of Afro-Germans, Africans, Afro-Europeans and African Americans During the Nazi Era*; *Race in the Global Era: African Americans at the Millennium*; *No Easy Victories: A History of Black Elected Officials*; *African Americans at the Crossroads: The Restructuring of Black Leadership and the 1992 Elections*; *The Struggle for Equal Education and Pipe Dream Blues: Racism and the War on Drugs*. Lusane is currently conducting research on the intersection of jazz and international relations, and the struggle for educational justice by Afro-Brazilians.

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RINKU SEN is the President and Executive Director of the Applied Research Center (ARC) and Publisher of *ColorLines* magazine. A leading figure in the racial justice movement, Rinku has positioned ARC as the home for media and activism on racial justice. She has extensive practical experience on the ground, with expertise in race, feminism, immigration and economic justice. Over the course of her career, Rinku has woven together journalism and organizing to further social change. She also has significant experience in philanthropy, as Vice Chair of the Schott Foundation for Public Education, and an Advisory Committee member of the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity. Previously, she was the Co-Director of the Center for Third World Organizing.

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labor, faith and other sectors—has worked tirelessly to defend and expand the rights of all immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status. Before joining the National Network, Tactaquin was involved for many years in grassroots organizing and advocacy in the Filipino community on issues of discrimination and foreign policy. In 1994, she helped found Migrant Rights International, an international alliance of migrant associations and human rights advocacy groups. Currently a member of MRI's Steering Committee, she also sits on the Board of Directors of the Poverty, Race and Research Action Council in Washington, D.C. and the Advisory Board of the Alston-Bannerman Fellowship Program for activists of color.

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MATTIE WEISS graduated with a political science degree from Swarthmore College, where she organized students and staff around issues of global economic justice, local race politics and a campus-based living-wage campaign. While in college, she was a community muralist and a union organizer in Minneapolis, and then worked for the Active Element Foundation in New York, doing research for the "Future 500" national youth organizing directory. After graduation, Weiss was a writer and researcher for the Applied Research Center in Oakland, CA, where she wrote and published *Youth Rising*, a major report on youth organizing around the country. She also wrote two chapters of the book *How to Get Stupid White Men Out of Office* and toured around the country organizing and speaking on behalf of the League of Pissed Off Voters in the 2004 presidential election. Weiss currently directs Campus Camp Wellstone, a national training program that teaches youth and students how to run winning grassroots campaigns. She has lived in Nicaragua, Bolivia, Brazil and South Africa.

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It's a New Day

By Jeff Chang

Throughout the north side of Pittsburgh, one of the city's three major Black districts, they lined up before dawn, hundreds deep in the 47-degree weather as if they were waiting for history to be made. Even after the polling places opened to an instant crawl, they kept coming.

And they kept coming all day.

One of them was a 19-year-old named Loric Frye. Frye was a Pennsylvanian, and because of that he was a key voter in the presidential election. Senator John McCain had staked his strategy on winning the state, hoping to steal it from Senator Barack Obama in his comeback bid.

But Frye was far from the kind of clean-scrubbed, neatly partisan, first-time voter Republicans would ever think to appeal to or CNN would ever bother to interview.

Frye was a young brother in oversized pants. His young son was at home, and his girlfriend was pregnant with their daughter. He had no high school diploma. He had no fancy title. Frye was—no, still is—in the process of putting it all together.

If you went strictly by the stats, he wasn't even supposed to have found his way into the voting booth that day. And, truth be told, he almost didn't.

He admits that up until last year, politics didn't interest him. Barack got his attention. But the person who really turned him around was a man named Paradise Gray. A legendary hip-hop promoter and activist, Gray got Frye work as a community organizer doing voter outreach.

Frye spent 2008 canvassing, registering and door-knocking with Khari Mosley and the League of Young Voters. He started to feel deeply invested in the election and the political process. He spent the last few weeks doing get-out-the-vote work. All politics remains local. All transformations begin with the personal.

So, Loric Frye was excited to cast his first ballot on November 4, 2008.

But when he showed up with his voter registration card, he was told he "wasn't qualified," he said. "Something about it was illegal."

At first, he thought it was the fact that he had been arrested once. But he had never been convicted or charged. He called Mosley and Gray. They came and took him down to the Board of Elections. There, Frye discovered that there were six registration forms in his name. Faced with conflicting information, including different social security numbers, some clerk had decided to disqualify him.

Frye had moved twice since filling out his first form, but he was so hyped to vote he made sure to re-register his new address each time.

When the Board of Elections official pulled out the other three forms, Frye could see that they were fakes. When dawn broke on November 4th, a massive national effort at election protection got underway, born of the nightmares from the disputed 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. It was aided in part by Web 2.0 tools. A fraudulent text message and a hacker-produced email at George Washington University that urged Obama voters to show up on Wednesday were both exposed via the Internet.

In battleground states like Pennsylvania, Virginia and Ohio, the highest voter turnout in almost a century led to worries about a lack of ballots and slow lines. At South Carolina State University, an historically Black college, dozens of students were told that their polling places had changed. Student activists and the NAACP organized buses to get 32 students to the correct locations but worried that at least 50 more were discouraged from voting.



THE ELECTION OF THE FIRST BIRACIAL BLACK PRESIDENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE U.S. SET OFF ECSTATIC CELEBRATIONS ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

Even Republicans circulated a memo detailing voting irregularities. Most of the incidents rose to nowhere near the level of the kinds of voter suppression that Democrats faced in Florida in 2000 or Ohio in 2004. In fact, the first incident listed on the memo—an accusation of intimidation by alleged members of the New Black Panther Party at a polling place in North Philadelphia—was little more than a hilarious televised encounter between a Fox News reporter and a Black poll-watcher that seemed as if it were scripted for “The Boondocks.”

Republicans also explored allegations of double-voting by students in Georgia; individuals in Kansas who may have voted both in person and through absentee ballots; unfilled absentee ballot requests in New Mexico; missing military absentee ballots in Virginia; and calls in Pennsylvania with fake polling information.

But hours later, all this seemed moot.

As soon as the polls closed in California, all of the networks called a landslide victory for Barack Obama. The margin was nowhere near close. In the popular vote, Obama beat McCain by nearly 6 million.

Over 90% of Blacks voted in record numbers for Obama. But he also won among women, split the white working class and picked up a much larger number of white, male voters than John Kerry had in 2004. Obama’s Electoral College tally corresponded to his margin of victory among young people, Asian Americans and Latinos: 2-1.

The election of the first biracial Black president in the history of the U.S. set off ecstatic celebrations all across the country. Twitter’s server stopped for a few

minutes, overloaded by messages. In Oakland, Berkeley and Seattle, people poured into the streets, and instant block parties sprang up as if it were the Bronx in the summer of ‘77. Crowds marched, cheering, to the White House. They filled Times Square as though it were New Year’s Eve. They came 1 million strong into Grant Park to hear Obama deliver his victory speech, the very place where the Democratic Party collapsed in police riots 40 years ago.

For a small group of people in Pittsburgh, the victory began earlier that day, when an elections official restored Frye’s right to vote and handed him a ballot. For Mosley, the League’s National Political Director, a longtime community organizer and a veteran of the 2004 battle, it was a gratifying moment.

“The biggest thing I’ve seen today is the number of young Blacks from the hood that have never voted—teenage parents, the formerly incarcerated—just an incredible number of people voting,” he said. “We’re really seeing a sea change. The college students have been voting. Now we’re seeing a movement among those who never did go to college. That could be monumental, not only on the local level but the national level.”

“Man, I’m happy as hell I get to vote,” Frye told Mosley. “I’m just so happy to get my voice heard.”

The victory would not belong just to Barack Obama, but also to Loric Frye. “I’m hoping for change,” Frye said. “I know it ain’t gon’ come today or tomorrow, but I’m hoping for change. I’m pushing for change.”

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

It's a New Day | By Jeff Chang

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Chang say that Loric Frye “wasn’t even supposed to have found his way into the voting booth yesterday?”
2. What are some of the things that can result in a person being disqualified from voting?
3. What is “election protection” and why is it necessary?
4. What methods were used by the League of Young Voters to promote participation in the election among young people?
5. What do you think Chang means by the phrase, “All politics remains local. All transformations begin with the personal”?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Participation of first-time voters in the 2008 election
2. Participation of young Blacks in the 2008 election
3. Differences in voter participation between college students and youth not in college

Obama's "Latino Problem"

By Sylvia Manzano

The nearly 67 million votes that elected Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States were cast by a diverse coalition of American voters. A supermajority of all Latino voters, 67 percent, cast their ballots for Obama. Support for Obama cut across the widest swaths of the diverse Latino population as he won the majority of all Latino sub-groups, including national origin, nativity, geographic region, gender and age (see Table below). Some were surprised that Obama carried the Latino vote by such a wide margin. This result was a direct contradiction to the false but recurring narrative woven by a steady chorus of media commentators: Latinos would not vote for a Black candidate.

Percent of Latino Vote Obama Won by Demographic Groups

STATE	Percent
Arizona	56%
California	74%
Colorado	61%
Florida	57%
Illinois	72%
Nevada	76%
New Jersey	78%
New Mexico	69%
Texas	63%

AGE	Percent
18-29	76%
30-44	63%
45-64	58%
65+	68%

GENDER	Percent
Men	64%
Women	68%

NATIVITY*	Percent
U.S.-born	57%
Foreign-born	68%

** Nativity data collected from 2008 Latino Decisions pre-election survey; all other data from CNN/NEP 2008 Exit Poll.*

This essay addresses the myth and the reality of the Latino vote in the 2008 presidential election. The discussion begins with an assessment of the types of stories that perpetuated the trope of Latinos as racist voters and highlights the erroneous conclusions drawn from anecdotal evidence versus prior election outcomes or survey data. Next, highly salient factors that influenced the Latino vote in the Democratic primaries are detailed. The essay concludes with an evaluation of Latinos in the 2008 election and their long-term prospects for influencing American politics.

OBAMA'S "LATINO PROBLEM"

In January 2008, the early days of the battle for the Democratic nomination, the *New Yorker* magazine interviewed Sergio Bendixon. Bendixon served Hillary Clinton's campaign as principal Latino pollster and strategist. When asked about the source of Clinton's support within the Latino community, Bendixon offered: "The Hispanic voter, and I want to say this very carefully, has not shown a lot of willingness or affinity to support Black candidates."¹ His cursory evaluation of Latino voters asserted that their political decision-making was rooted in racist sentiments toward Blacks. Political news reporters and pundits from print, online, television and radio outlets took note of this interpretation of Latino politics. Time and again reporters and commentators echoed the message of Latino animus against Blacks as if it were fact. It was coined Obama's "Latino Problem."

The real problem, however, is that there is no empirical evidence to support the notion that Latinos have widespread and intense distaste for Blacks, so much so that they would cast a ballot against any Black on the ballot. To the contrary, there are many high-profile electoral contests wherein a majority of Latino voters supported Black candidates. Specific to the 2008 Democratic primaries, there is quite a bit of survey research demonstrating that for Latinos a vote for Hillary Clinton was not a vote *against* Barack Obama. Rather, Clinton enjoyed many political advantages common to incumbents that played to her favor, particularly within the Latino community.

Pitting Latinos against Blacks became a fairly easy story to report because it was not that difficult to find anecdotes in which Latinos made disparaging remarks.

These stories had similar formulas: they began with doubts about Obama's ability to win Latino votes, then moved on to include a specific story about local Latino Democrats who openly affirmed that racism would influence their vote. Additionally, these stories frequently mentioned that older Latinos were among the most hostile toward Blacks.

A *New York Times* article that ran in January 2008 illustrates this pattern: "Many Latinos are not ready for a person of color,' Natasha Carrillo, 20, of East Los Angeles, said. 'I don't think many Latinos will vote for Obama. There's always been tension in the black and Latino communities. There's still that strong ethnic division.'" The article goes on to say, "Javier Perez...said older Hispanics like his grandmother tended to resist more the notion of supporting an African-American, a trend that he said was changing with younger Hispanics... 'She just became a citizen five years ago. Unfortunately, that will play a role in her vote. I do think race will play a part in her decision.'"²

Similarly the *Los Angeles Times* ran an op-ed column by Raoul Contreras who wrote of his grandfather's voting in California elections, "My retired ironworker grandfather, who never voted for a Republican in his life, came back from Mexico to vote against Bradley (an Black). Why? Because, he told me, he would never vote for a black candidate for governor. His attitude ran rampant in the Latino community, particularly among older Latinos."³ Another oft-quoted racist sentiment came from 84-year-old Dallas native Adelfa Callejo, who said, "Obama simply has a problem that he happens to be [B]lack."⁴

All of this is not to say that there are no racial tensions between any combination or pairing of racial groups. While all of these quotes and anecdotes reveal individual prejudices, they remain indicative only of the attitudes of the particular person in the story. These tales of bigotry were the only evidence of the supposed Obama "Latino problem." It is troubling that more of these news stories did not incorporate counter-narratives that considered past Latino political preferences in elections with diversity on the ballot.

On occasion, articles and reports would run with the "unconventional" view that Latino animus toward Blacks was overstated. Two of the strongest voices on this point were political science professors Matt Barreto

1. Lizza, Ryan. "Minority Reports." *The New Yorker*. January 21, 2008.

2. Nagourney, Adam and Jennifer Steinhauer. "In Pursuit of Latinos Race Plays Role." *New York Times*. January 15, 2008.

3. Contreras, Raoul. "The Bradley Effect is Still In Effect." *Los Angeles Times*. February 5, 2008.

4. Solis, Dianne. "Dallas Hispanic Leader's Comment On Obama Lead Look at Old Ethnic Tensions."

Dallas Morning News. February 28, 2008.

at the University of Washington and Ricardo Ramirez at the University of Southern California. In an op-ed that ran in the *Los Angeles Times*, the two academics took aim at the Latino-as-racist-voters trope using empirical evidence to refute the incorrect conventional wisdom. They pointed to a slew of elections where 70 to 80 percent of Latinos voted for Blacks, including mayors Harold Washington (Chicago), David Dinkins (New York City), Wellington Webb (Denver), Roosevelt Dorn (Inglewood, CA), Ron Kirk (Dallas) and California Congresswoman Maxine Waters.

An interesting point raised in the Barreto and Ramirez op-ed that was grossly under-reported elsewhere is that Obama's brief political career was punctuated with extensive support from the Latino community. "In 2000, when Obama challenged incumbent Bobby Rush in the Democratic primary for 1st Congressional District in Illinois, he won more Latino votes than Black votes. In 2004, when he ran for the U.S. Senate Democratic nomination in Illinois, Obama received more Latino votes than Latino candidate Gerry Chico. Claims that Latinos will not vote for Obama are clearly false."⁵

EXPLAINING THE "FIREWALL"

As the weeks and months of the long electoral season passed, and the Democratic primaries made their way through the states, it was evident that Latino voters were squarely behind Hillary Clinton. Popular analysis continued to infer that a Latino vote for Clinton actually reflected anti-Black attitudes. It was also noted that Clinton could count on Latino voters. They were, as her campaign and others said, her "firewall" in states where Latinos comprised a critical proportion of the electorate. There are a host of reasons that have nothing to do with race that explain why Latinos voted for Clinton in most of these states. Clinton was a formidable primary candidate due to her enormous popularity among Democratic voters. It could be argued that Hillary Clinton is one of the most recognized women in the world, an incredible advantage for any candidate running for any office. Recall that before Obama's grand upset in Iowa, Hillary Clinton was the clear frontrunner for the nomination, with a majority of all racial groups polling in her favor. She famously took note of this status in a November 2007 debate, saying: "People are not attacking me because I am a woman.

They are attacking me because I'm ahead."

Latino voters, like most others in the electorate, were far more familiar with Clinton than they were with any of the other candidates for the Democratic nomination. Voters strongly associated Hillary Clinton's candidacy with her husband's presidency; her policy and political positions were already well known. Among Latino voters, this was a real benefit, as Bill Clinton had cultivated strong relationships with Latino elected officials, organizations and voters during the course of his eight years as President. Most candidates must spend a great deal of time and money to make their personal and political dimensions known to voters. Latino voters did not have to get to know Hillary Clinton—they already knew her to be supportive of policy and politics that favored Latinos. Bill Clinton appointed more Latinos to senior-level government positions than any of his predecessors. Among these were very popular Latino politicians Bill Richardson, Henry Cisneros and Federico Peña, who served in cabinet posts. The number of Latino elected officials rose across the country during the Clinton years, and both Bill and Hillary Clinton were frequently involved in fundraising efforts to support this growing constituency of Democratic officials.

Having some political history with elected officials and the communities they represented translated into a significant advantage for Hillary Clinton's candidacy. She was able to lock up endorsements from the vast majority of Latino elected officials across the country before the first primary or caucus even took place. These elected officials frequently served as campaign surrogates and assisted her efforts in mobilizing the Latino electorate to her support. In short, Latino voters were enthusiastic about Hillary Clinton as a candidate, a point that is rarely discussed.

At the same time, there is evidence that while most Latinos did not vote for Obama in the primary, this constituency viewed him quite favorably. Studies by the Latino Decisions research group showed that in Nevada, California and Texas well over 50 percent of Latino voters consistently said they held favorable impressions of Obama. More importantly, even at the early stage in the election when these surveys were in the field (January and February 2008), the majority of Latinos indicated they would indeed vote for Obama over the Republican candidate if he were to win the

5. Barreto, Matt A. and Ricardo Ramirez. "The Latino Vote is Pro-Clinton, Not Anti-Obama." *Los Angeles Times*. February 7, 2008.

nomination.⁶ Significantly, these favorable dispositions were expressed at a juncture in the campaign season when Obama had a much lower profile than Hillary Clinton. His favorable ratings likely rose as voters became more acquainted with him.

ELECTION OUTCOMES

When Election Day arrived, Obama handily carried the Latino vote. The Pew Hispanic Research Center notes: “No other major demographic voting group in the country swung so heavily to Obama as Latinos did between the primaries and the general election this year.”⁷ This is quite an outcome given the punditry that predicted racism would keep Latinos from voting for Obama. A few specific sub-groups that turned out for Obama merit further notice. First, over two-thirds (68 percent) of Latinos age 65 and over voted for Obama. This was the cohort of Latinos that media reports had pegged as the most race-conscious voters. In Florida, 57 percent of Latino voters voted Obama. This is a significant shift for the Florida Latino electorate, overwhelmingly Cuban American, which has consistently voted majority Republican in prior presidential elections.

Rural Latino voters were *not* anything like rural white voters in their candidate preference. In Texas, Obama carried only 28 of the state’s 254 counties. Of the 28 counties, 22 were predominantly rural Latino majority counties south of IH10 and in far west Texas. Thus, any theories correlating lack of social contact and racist voting did not hold for Latinos. Even Latinos with little exposure to Blacks in their daily life supported Barack Obama. This was not the case among white voters.

Following national trends, the youngest Latino voters, 19-29, were the most enthusiastic, with 76 percent voting Obama. The implications of this under-30 vote are of critical importance, as the Latino population is much younger than other racial groups in the U.S. and growing at a much more rapid rate, as well. The deep and broad Latino support for Obama in the general election demonstrates that the crass comments and less than harmonious attitudes of individuals do not validate the notion of a racial rift and animus among the entire electorate.

Despite the campaign’s heated moments, the two Democratic candidates wound up mobilizing voters in all 50 states and articulating a list of policy priorities that, while resonating with the broader electorate, had special appeal to voters of color. Healthcare, jobs and education are highly salient to voters who are on the losing side of the racial and class disparities that characterize these issues. The Democrats emerged from the primaries having addressed core issues and having made direct appeals to Latino voters.

The Republicans, on the other hand, depleted any goodwill that had been established during the Bush campaigns of 2000 and 2004. They essentially burned their brand with Latino voters throughout the Republican primary season via press releases, debate posturing and inflammatory language surrounding immigration policy. Among Republicans, it was even considered controversial to establish Latino outreach efforts. *Newsweek* noted that this remained the case even after McCain had won the nomination; his campaign was quite ambivalent about identifying any paid staffer with the explicit role of Latino mobilization.⁸ Republicans practiced negative recruitment—they repelled Latinos from the party by associating themselves with not only anti-immigrant rhetoric, but also shady border vigilante groups such as the Minuteman Project. Latino voters assessed that the Republican Party, to which they had only recently begun to warm, was not particularly interested in their support.

Latinos were essential to shifting several traditionally Republican states into the Democratic column. New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado and Florida saw large Latino turnouts that heavily favored Obama and delivered their state’s electoral votes. These results gave the lie to the baseless speculation and anecdotes about the racial attitudes of Latino voters. In a note of things to come in national politics, Paul Burka of *Texas Monthly* writes, “The Republicans are strongest where Texas is not growing. The Democrats are strongest where it is growing.”⁹ Texas is growing where Latinos reside, and both parties are now paying attention to this national trend. In future elections, it is likely that Latinos will no longer be viewed as a wedge issue or group, but rather as a vital, active constituency in the electorate.

6. www.pacificmarketresearch.com/ld/

7. Lopez, Mark Hugo. *The Hispanic Vote in 2008*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, November 2008.

8. Ramirez, Jessica and Holly Bailey. “Why Won’t Juan Come to the Phone: McCain’s Hispanic Outreach Chief is Both Loved and Loathed.” *Newsweek*. July 19, 2008.

9. Burka, Paul. “Two-Party Animal.” *Texas Monthly*. December 2008.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Obama's "Latino Problem" | By Sylvia Manzano

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was Obama's "Latino Problem"? What evidence did pundits and journalists present to support the idea that he had such a problem?
2. Why do you think the narrative about Latino unwillingness to support an Black candidate was so widely accepted and promoted by the media? Was there countervailing evidence? What was it?
3. What political advantages did Hillary Clinton have with Latino voters in the primaries? How did she exploit those advantages?
4. Manzano says that Republicans "burned their brand with Latino voters." How did they manage to do that?
5. Why do you think Latino voters swung so hard toward Obama during the general election?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Which media outlets promoted the idea that Obama had a "Latino Problem"?
2. What is the Minuteman Project?
3. Latino turnout and voting patterns in New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado and Florida
4. Comparative Latino turnout and voting patterns in 2000, 2004, 2008

Grits and Gravy

Obama's Challenge to the Southern Strategy

By Keith Jennings and William Boone

The November 4, 2008 electoral victory by Barack Obama was one of the most stunning developments in United States history. Besides being the first Black elected President of the United States, Obama's landside victory in the Electoral College¹ reflected a remarkably well organized and disciplined campaign strategy that included the determination to win electoral votes in the South, an area of the country previously considered "safe" Republican Party territory by most political observers.

Obama and his campaign team wrote a new chapter in the book of national political organizing. Obama's performance in the South and what it may mean for further progressive political organizing in the region are no less important than the campaign's skillful introduction and use of information technology and the phenomenal amount of money raised (over \$600,000,000) from small- and medium-size donations. It may well have given rise to a new electoral coalition and a new model of political organizing for progressive candidates and those of color. Obama's breakthrough in the South was simply remarkable, filled with historic, social, cultural and political significance.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the "Southern Strategy" has been defeated, just as it would be enormously naïve to conclude that, because of Obama's victory, racism has been overcome. We did not magically enter a "post-racial political period" on November 5, 2008.

In fact, our view is quite the opposite. The facts on the ground suggest that the breakthrough was exactly that—a breakthrough. While it signals what is possible and where the rest of the South is headed, assuming continued political organizing around day-to-day concerns, the current right-wing hold on politics in the South remains a formidable reactionary force on city councils, within county commissions, among the judi-

ciary and in state legislative bodies. Despite Obama's groundbreaking wins in Virginia, North Carolina and Florida, a closer look at his performance, especially among young white Southerners, suggests that the change many believe has already been achieved has, in fact, not yet arrived. Transformative strategies are necessary to secure and build on the 2008 breakthrough.

THE SOUTHERN STRATEGY: THE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S RACIAL APPEAL IN THE NEW SOUTH

The long struggle for the right of political participation was a central theme of almost all of the major Black human rights organizations founded in the early years of the 20th century. Prior to the signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the overwhelming majority of Blacks, Latinos and Native Americans either could not vote or faced state-sanctioned restrictions on their right to participate in the political process ranging from poll taxes to literacy tests—restrictions enforced by an extra-judicial reign of terror.

From 1948 to 1984, the Southern states, traditionally a stronghold for the Democrats, became key swing states, providing the popular vote margins in the 1960, 1968 and 1976 elections. But by 1964 it had become clear that the segregationist Democratic Party could no longer contain the tensions within it. Human rights leaders such as Fannie Lou Hamer,

1. The final total was Obama's 365 to McCain's 173 electoral votes while the popular vote was much closer at 53%, or 66,882,230 million votes for Obama to 46%, or 58,343,671 votes for McCain.

along with others in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, challenged the segregationist delegation at the 1964 Atlantic City, New Jersey Democratic Convention. The human rights struggles in Birmingham and Selma crystallized the resolve of Blacks to resist political domination by racist conservatives.

During this era, several Republican candidates expressed support for states' rights, signaling their opposition to the passage of legislation to protect the franchise and federal enforcement of civil rights for Blacks. The Southern Strategy emerged as the crystallization of the "anti-civil rights movement" in electoral form. It was led initially by Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, who was able to win five Southern states in 1964 based largely on his opposition to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The 1964 Goldwater Campaign was followed by the presidential campaign of the openly racist Alabama Governor George Wallace. Running as an Independent, Wallace was able to carry seven Southern states in 1968. His 1972 campaign was cut short when he was shot.

Changes were clearly on the horizon, brought forth by the civil rights movement of the 1960s. A political backlash emerged, and, with Blacks demanding political representation, many southern Democrats looked for a new home outside the Democratic Party. The switch in party identification by white Southerners was led by some of the most staunchly racist southern Democrats. One of the first policymakers to join the Republican Party was the former Dixiecrat leader and 1948 presidential candidate, South Carolina Senator Strom Thurman, who switched in 1964.

The success of Goldwater and Wallace was not lost on Republican Party strategists. In a 1970 *New York Times* interview, Kevin Phillips concluded:

From now on, the Republicans are never going to get more than 10 to 20 percent of the Negro vote and they don't need any more than that...but Republicans would be shortsighted if they weakened enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. The more Negroes who register as Democrats in the South, the sooner the Negrophobe whites will quit the Democrats and become Republicans. That's where the votes are. Without that prodding from the blacks, the whites will backslide into their old comfortable arrangement with the local Democrats.²

Richard Nixon's team took note of both the 1964 and 1968 developments, and by the 1972 elections the "Southern Strategy" was being perfected. Nixon's

coded language of "law and order" and "states' rights" led to his winning in nine southern states. The language used in the racial appeal to white Southerners may have been articulated in less virulent terms than those used by segregationists like George Wallace, but the message was clearly understood: The Republican Party is the party for white people.

The Southern Strategy became the core of the Republican Party's national organizing approach to presidential campaigns. Their faith in that strategy was so firm that in 1980 Ronald Reagan launched his national campaign against Jimmy Carter from Philadelphia, Mississippi, the site of the notorious 1964 murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner.

The impact of the mass exodus of white Southerners from the Democratic Party was the routine delivery of the South to the Republican Party. In fact, prior to the 2008 elections, Republicans won seven out of the previous ten presidential contests, largely with a reliable Southern-based vote. The table below reflects part of that history.

Southern States' Electoral Votes Won by the Two Major Political Parties

Presidential Election Year	Democrats	Republicans
1980	18	127
1984	0	153
1988	5	147
1992	54	108
1996	64	96
2000	0	150
2004	0	161
2008	57	104

Source: Center for Citizens Participation

2. See James Boyd, "Nixon's Southern Strategy: It's All In The Charts" *New York Times* May 17, 1970, p. 21

DEMOCRATIC PARTY DILEMMAS

On the Democratic side, even some of the leading officials who were supportive of the goals of the civil rights movement knew that the 1965 Voting Rights Act would split the Democratic Party and cause havoc with respect to a national organizing strategy. In fact, shortly after signing the Voting Rights Act into law, President Lyndon Johnson reportedly stated, “We’ve lost the South for a hundred years.”

As the power of the Republican Party grew in the South and “Reagan Democrats” became a force nationwide, the Democratic Party struggled for a viable strategy. Only in the 1976, 1992 and 1996 elections, with Southern white men at the top of the ticket, were they able to gain the White House.

In 2000 and 2004, the Party made a strategic decision to write off the South. The nominees and their top advisors believed that they could win without winning anywhere in the South. A number of strategists and academics wrote influential articles and books regarding the best way to “whistle past Dixie” on the way to the White House.

The practical problem with this national organizing strategy was that there was no room for error. With the South conceded, losing any one of the 18 designated battleground states could mean losing the entire election. The implementation of that strategy in both 2000 and 2004 led to a concentration of resources and basically rendered several potentially competitive states non-competitive.

Perhaps the most glaring error with the “whistling” strategy was that it ignored the most loyal voting bloc within the Democratic Party, i.e., Blacks. Close to 60 percent of the country’s Black population is located in the South, and Black voters have provided the Democratic Party with an average of 90 percent of their votes in all national elections since 1964. In most of the Southern states, Blacks now constitute between 40 and 50 percent of Democratic Party primary voters. However, the national strategy of the Democrats, especially since the 1990s, was to run away from its more liberal base in an attempt to win back some of the Reagan Democrats.

Additionally, a singular focus on the top of the ticket, i.e., winning the White House, meant that very competitive Senate and House seats were ignored time and time again. Since Harvey Gantt’s historic contests with the racist Senator Jesse Helms in North Carolina

during the 1980s, the Democratic Party had shown little interest in state-wide elections in the deep South when Blacks were the candidates. Both times Gantt ran he came within a few thousand votes of defeating Helms but did not receive the level of support from the national Democratic Party that he believed was needed to defeat the conservative icon. As Gantt’s chances improved, Helms resorted to an openly racist communications strategy of airing misleading, racially charged anti-affirmative action television ads across the state.

The lack of Democratic Party interest in Southern electoral contests seems odd given the evidence to support the idea of the Party being able to offer robust challenges to Republican dominance of the region. Election results at the state and local levels and the possibility of building strategic coalitions composed of core Democratic constituencies were dismissed or simply ignored.

OBAMA CHALLENGES THE SOUTHERN STRATEGY

That a Southern battleground existed at all during the 2008 elections was clear testament to the resource-rich Obama phenomenon and the campaign’s determination to challenge the Republicans all across the country, including in the South. The campaign’s “50-state strategy,” supported by Howard Dean and the Democratic National Committee, was successful in challenging the Republicans in states previously won by Bush and a long roster of Republican candidates before him. As the general election neared, the Southern Battleground that took shape included the possibility of wins in Virginia, North Carolina and Florida.

By winning these states, Obama won 57 of the 270 electoral votes he needed to be elected president, or 21 percent. More importantly, he was able to finally break the stranglehold the Republican Party had developed over the entire South over more than 30 years. Chris Kromm of *Southern Exposure* magazine correctly observed: “Those who don’t believe the South is important to national politics will dismiss the results, echoing outgoing Sen. John Warner’s claim in a recent interview that Florida, North Carolina and Virginia are ‘different’ from the rest of the South. On the contrary, these states are symbols of the direction much of the South is headed, not just a region with more “outsiders” but a younger, more urban and more richly diverse South overall.”³

3. Kromm, Chris, “A New South Rising,” *Facing South*, online magazine of the Institute for Southern Studies, November 23, 2008. www.southernstudies.org/2008/11/a-new-south-rising.html

It is important to appreciate the historic nature of Obama's victory in the South. Nationally he received more of the white vote than any Democratic presidential candidate since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. And Obama won close to 20 million votes in the South. But it would be an enormous mistake to equate the fact that three Southern states helped elect the first Black president with the defeat of the Southern Strategy.

The truth of the matter is that even if McCain had won Virginia, North Carolina and Florida, he still would not have won the presidency in 2008. He would have finished with a more respectable total of 230 electoral votes but little else. In other words, Obama could have won the election without winning in the South.

More importantly, a rigorous assessment of the 2008 election results provides evidence of how and to what extent the South is changing, while giving the lie to notions of a "post-racial" society or a radically transformed South.

Below are the national results of Obama's performance among several key demographic groups.

National Electoral Results

Category	Obama	McCain
Male	49%	48%
Female	56%	43%
18-29	66%	32%
30-44	52%	46%
45-64	50%	49%
65 and above	45%	53%
2004	0	161
2008	57	104

Source: CNN 2008 General Election Exit Polls

Nationwide, Obama won the women's vote 56 percent to McCain's 43 percent. However, in the South he lost the white women's vote to McCain 21 percent to 78 percent. For example, in Georgia white women voted for McCain/Palin 74 percent to 26

percent for Obama/Biden, while Black women voted 97 percent for Obama/Biden to 2 percent for McCain/Palin. In Alabama, white women voted 88 percent for McCain/Palin to 10 percent for Obama/Biden, while Black women voted 96 percent for Obama/Biden to 4 percent for McCain/Palin.

Additionally, Obama was able to win over 40 percent of the total white vote nationwide. In Virginia and North Carolina, he was able to win 39 percent and 35 percent respectively. However, in the Deep South states of South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Arkansas, he was able to garner on average only 10 percent of the white vote.

As is clear from the numbers, change won't come easy in the South. Obama did not do as well among white Southern voters as previous Democratic candidates have done since 1976, excluding Dukakis in 1988. A sober assessment of those numbers might lead one to conclude that there was no defeat of the Southern Strategy but only a breakthrough in three southern states undergoing rapid demographic change. The truth is somewhere in between.

Obama's nationwide performance among all voters tends to mask the electoral racism that manifested itself on election day. The sad fact is that even among young whites, a group that Obama handily won nationwide 60 percent to 39 percent, in the Deep South an overwhelming majority cast their votes for 73-year-old John McCain.

Young White Southerners and the 2008 Elections

Georgia	Obama	McCain
White 18-29	20%	79%
White 30-44	32%	67%
Alabama	Obama	McCain
White 18-29	13%	84%
White 30-44	10%	86%
Virginia	Obama	McCain
White 18-29	42%	56%
White 30-44	38%	60%

Source: CNN 2008 General Election Exit Polls

DEMOCRATS CAN NEVER AGAIN CONSIDER WHISTLING PAST DIXIE. THE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S SOUTHERN STRATEGY WAS ONLY ABLE TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S ACQUIESCENCE.

A NEW ELECTORAL MAP

Despite Obama's poor showing among whites in the Deep South, the 2008 elections laid a foundation for the future. The South is the fastest growing region of the country, even outpacing the Southwest. Globalization and deindustrialization in the Northeast and Midwest have led to a major population shift in the country. In fact, for Blacks one of the greatest reverse migrations has been underway for some time. Latino growth in the South is second only to the Southwest. In some Southern states the growth of the Latino population has had specific political impact. In Florida, for example, the Cuban population has been, until recently, a reliably Republican bloc. The diversification of the Latino population to include Puerto Ricans and Central and South Americans has created new openings for Democratic candidates.

Reapportionment and statewide redistricting will be based on the upcoming 2010 census. Most projections show New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio and New Jersey losing electoral votes, all of which have been seen as either reliably Democratic states or states in which the party could strongly contend.

Five Southern states are projected to gain congressional seats and electoral votes: Texas, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. These shifts impact the electoral map that helped put Barack Obama in office.

In the past, the most important electoral states for the Democrats have been concentrated in the Midwest and Northeast, which was the rationale for an 18-state Electoral College strategy. However, given the rapid demographic changes, the new electoral map will include states in every region. Perhaps the new battleground states will be composed of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Georgia, Texas, Florida, Missouri, Virginia, North Carolina, Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado and Minnesota.

LOOKING FORWARD

Obama's campaign clearly understood that it made little sense to once again hand the Republicans a

161 electoral vote lead and then try to beat them to the 270 needed to win the presidency. Obama was able to redefine the national political strategy of the Democratic Party, perhaps for generations. Democrats can never again consider whistling past Dixie. The Republican Party's Southern Strategy was only able to work effectively with the Democratic Party's acquiescence. There is a new political arithmetic associated with Southern presidential campaigning, in spite of the poor showing among white voters in several Deep South states. The electoral model presented by Obama is a winning model not only for candidates of color at the national, state and local levels but also for liberal and progressive candidates generally.

The "New South" will be in play in the 2012 elections. Given today's realities, it would make sense for a progressive strategy in the South to include the following key elements:

1. Implementation of voter registration and mobilization initiatives
2. Development and advocacy of empowerment strategies around the redistricting debate
3. Identification of key U.S. senatorial races that a mobilized vote can impact
4. A combination of advocacy and electoral coalition-building on community concerns
5. Development and implementation of a comprehensive election observation program

Without implementation of a focused progressive strategy, the political gains won by the Obama campaign will evaporate, the old Southern Strategy will reemerge and the national win will not translate into a thoroughgoing reformation of the politics of the region.

On May 17, 1957, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declared, "Give us the ballot and we will transform the South." Fifty years later, Obama and Southern voters used the ballot to challenge the politics of the old South, making an historic contribution to American political development. This is change we can believe in and continue to build upon.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Grits and Gravy: Obama's Challenge to the Southern Strategy

By Keith Jennings and William Boone

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jennings and Boone say that, by the mid 1960s, the Democratic Party “could no longer contain the tensions within it.” What were those tensions? Why couldn't they be contained?
2. How did Republican Party leaders and candidates encourage white southerners to abandon the Democratic Party?
3. How did segregationist elected officials contribute to the development of the Southern Strategy?
4. What was the impact of the Southern Strategy on national elections? How is that impact related to the Electoral College?
5. Why do you think Obama decided to compete in the South?
6. Jennings and Boone contend that while Obama achieved a breakthrough, the Southern Strategy has not been defeated. What evidence do they present to support this view?
7. Why do you think the voting patterns of white youth were so different in the South than they were in other parts of the country?
8. Jennings and Boone present the elements of a progressive electoral strategy for the South. Discuss each element. What other tactics do you think are important?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's challenge in Atlantic City
2. Martin Luther King Jr.'s May 17, 1957 speech and Letter from the Birmingham Jail
3. Governor George Wallace's presidential campaigns
4. The “whistling past Dixie” strategy
5. Obama campaign strategy in Florida, North Carolina and Virginia

Translating the Youthquake

By Camille Cyprian and Mattie Weiss

Young people came out deep and fierce in the 2008 presidential election. Twenty-three million people under the age of 30 made up this “youthquake,” 3.4 million more than in 2004. And more than two-thirds of them voted for Barack Obama. Ninety-five percent of Black youth and 76 percent of young Latina/os voted Democratic. But youthquake numbers don’t tell the whole story about what this election meant for our generation and what we meant to it.

Activist youth of color played the critical role of *translators* in their communities. We mean this in a multi-dimensional sense. They translated spoken language, of course, but they also interpreted political discourse and broke open access codes for other young people and their broader communities. In doing so, young people of color filled holes in the electoral organizing infrastructure that, had they not stepped in, would otherwise have been ignored, at progressives’ peril.

LITERAL TRANSLATORS

In the most literal sense, as translators of written and spoken language, young people were critical in mobilizing their communities. In particular, second-generation immigrant youth occupied a pivotal position in this election as translators between their families and the American political process. They translated phone scripts, door-knocked bilingually and interpreted essential election rules and information.

Columbus, Ohio is home to one of the largest Somali communities in North America. Yet with over 10,000 eligible voters in the metro area, the community had never previously demonstrated power at the ballot box. The community’s “leaders” were an entrenched handful of elderly individuals with little actual standing amongst Columbus’s Somalis.

At a local Columbus hookah bar called the Gypsy Café, a group of friends and acquaintances feverishly excited about the son-of-an-African Obama candidacy came together to organize Somali power for the

election. Mena Sheik was the ringleader of this crew, which grew quickly to 20 core members and saw itself as a means to a greater end. They called themselves Kalaay Vote—“Come Vote” in Somali—and set about mobilizing the rest of the community to the ballot box.

One of the first barriers was language. There was no door-to-door canvassing operation in Somali. Official information about the election didn’t exist in Somali, and there was no network of Somali translators to help people understand their ballots on Election Day. So Kalaay Vote undertook the massive task of translating into Somali *all* key documents put out by the Secretary of State, as well as their own full-ballot Voter Guide. They organized rides to the polls and coordinated translators for the entire month of Early Voting in Ohio.

In Oakland, California, a group of high school women used their status as second-generation, bilingual immigrants to involve their parents and elders in a fight against several right-wing ballot initiatives. Sisters in Action for Issues of Reproductive Empowerment (SAFIRE), a youth program of Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (ACRJ), trains 30-40 high school women from immigrant and refugee families each year as leaders and organizers for reproductive justice.

Together, SAFIRE and ACRJ poured their energy into helping their communities understand four right-wing ballot initiatives. They particularly focused on Proposition 4, a state constitutional amendment that would have banned abortions for minors until 48 hours after parental notification. They printed voter

guides on Proposition 4 in Korean, Khmer, Vietnamese and Chinese. Input from the SAFIRE youth led the messaging of the ACRJ voter guides. They phone-banked Oakland residents, and, over and over, people on the other end of the line said that this was the first election-related call they had ever received and that they were thrilled to be involved. Proposition 4 was rejected by California voters.

POLITICAL TRANSLATORS

The main reason that young people don't vote, next to not knowing *how*, is that they don't feel like they understand the issues or candidates, or—perhaps more often—don't feel like elections have anything to do with their lives.

Obama's candidacy transformed this sense of disconnect for millions of young people, who saw themselves in his multiracial, international, non-nuclear family identity and were moved by his message of what was possible in this country. Obama's candidacy brought us light years forward in terms of young people seeing themselves in the electoral process. But Obamamania didn't directly translate into a greater understanding among young people of the national policy dialogue or engagement in *local* campaigns and issues. This next step required young people working their butts off to make sure that their peers knew exactly what they were voting on and how those issues impact them. In other words, translating political speak to real talk.

Generation Vote is an alliance of 18 national student and/or youth organizations from a range of sectors, including organizing, media, training and leadership development, who engaged their constituents around the 2008 election. Generation Vote has a particular focus on young people of color and low-income youth. In its commitment to move the issues and perspectives of marginalized young people from the periphery to the center of the national dialogue, Generation Vote developed an organizing/messaging tool called the "Youth Agenda." The Youth Agenda laid out the top nine issues for progressive young people—from education to healthcare to safety to rights for new Americans—translating campaign "buzz words" into their real-talk implications for young people's lives. The piece was framed as "9 Questions for the Next President," and for each of the nine key youth issues, Generation Vote asked the questions *they* wanted answered.

For example, the most visible conversation about healthcare in the presidential race revolved around questions of premiums, tax credits, single-payer and prescription drug benefits. However, the Youth Agenda asked the following:

Can I see a doctor? Can I see a doctor without drowning in debt? What if I'm in a car accident? What if the condom breaks? What if I get HIV? What if I

come back from Iraq with PTSD? Can I get preventative care, so I don't need to wait until I'm in a crisis?

Under each of the nine issue areas, questions were followed by a statement of belief:

We believe high-quality physical and mental healthcare, including full reproductive health services and prescription drugs, is a right and must be affordable and accessible to all.

Generation Vote printed 120,000 8x11 glossy copies of the Youth Agenda with a tear-off portion for potential voters to provide their contact information, rank the issues most important to them and volunteer to get involved. These were then distributed to member organizations, which used the Youth Agenda to build a deeper, more issue-based conversation about the election with the young people they sought to mobilize.

While Generation Vote worked to define a national agenda for young people, many other youth organizations were busy doing similar work on a local level. In the Twin Cities, a chapter of the national League of Young Voters (known locally as the League of Pissed Off Voters) developed a comprehensive endorsement slate for all races in Minneapolis and St. Paul. They developed the slate in response to a significant issue for young people (and, let's be real, for most people): down-ballot voting.

Generally, where young people have been engaged around elections, they are mobilized around a specific candidate or, more broadly, a political party. So while voters may know exactly who they want for President, or even a U.S. Senate race or specific ballot initiative, they often have little grasp of races and issues further down the ballot. This means that the experience of voting, particularly for new voters, is often one of pride and excitement mixed with alienation and disillusion. Voters may leave most of the ballot blank or fill in some bubbles for a woman candidate, or the one with the Latino-sounding last name.

In the belief that these down-ballot races—from judges to school boards to county commissioners—often have the most actual impact on individuals' lives, the Twin Cities League of Pissed Off Voters developed an endorsement slate to break down and look deep into these local races. Having already identified the top issues for local young people through several months of canvassing at high-traffic youth spots in low-turnout neighborhoods, a team of six writers and researchers in their twenties culled interviews, websites, voter guides and insider information from local grassroots leaders to inform their endorsements on over 40 races. In this way, the League turned the entire ballot into a user-friendly, straight-talk progressive tool that allowed people to feel more engaged and empowered in their vote.

Candidates and referenda were ranked from "Well, Okay," to "Oh Hell Yeah," with details about how each

candidate stood on the issues important to Twin Cities youth. Here are two examples from the U.S. House race:

U.S. Representative – District 5

Keith Ellison – OH HELL YEAH

Ellison is our man. He takes young people seriously. He's proposed legislation for national same-day voter registration, is a key figure pushing for Green Jobs, and is fighting for college tax credits for room/board, books and fees. He's pushing GLBT issues in Congress, and cosponsored articles of impeachment against Bush! One caveat: we're angry about Ellison's bailout vote.

U.S. Representative – District 6

El Tinklenberg – YEAH

Tinklenberg is a fine guy—he's serious about renewable energy and higher ed access—but compared to his opponent, Michelle Bachmann, he's a saint. Bachmann (MN's answer to Sarah Palin), has voted against children's health care (!), veterans' benefits, and public safety. She's against teaching evolution and believes global warming is a "voodoo hoax." So for the love of all things rational, vote Tinklenberg.

The Twin Cities League distributed 22,000 copies of the slate, hand-to-hand, and in the last two days of the election got over 5,000 hits on their online version.

CULTURAL TRANSLATORS

While some young activists spoke in Somali, Chinese or Spanish and others spoke in policy and platforms, another group of activists of color spoke in poem, in YouTube video, in song. These were the cultural translators of the election.

Unable to vote against California's ballot propositions themselves, members of SAFIRE decided that one of the most effective ways to communicate their voices and experiences was through Web 2.0 technologies. They created YouTube videos that spread a viral message on the impact of Propositions 4, 6 and 8 and the need for voters to stand with youth in this election. SAFIRE developed a YouTube video asking eligible voters to "Use your voice to protect mine." Over a beat and images of girls' feet in sneakers and ballet slippers, the young women ask: "What would you do if you were in my shoes?" A young woman talks about the implications of a specific proposition on her life and her family. The video ends with a girl in glasses, in front of a painted protest banner saying: "I may not be old enough to vote this year, but I'm a strong young woman with a voice dedicated to help those not old enough, not citizen enough, not free enough." A chorus of "Vote" follows a pair of feet as they turn and walk into the world. Sneakers, spoken word and young Asian women's faces are not mainstream electoral themes in this country, but by using these themes and an electoral message, SAFIRE built a cultural bridge for members of its community.

In Ohio, a group of fellows with Young People for the American Way began organizing parties, speakers and big-name shows at Central State and Wilberforce University—historically Black colleges—in order to make electoral engagement a pop culture phenomenon. Their goal at these target schools was to register 5,000 young people, turn out 7,000 on Election Day and hold huge events on campus emphasizing young people's political power and issue agendas.

Power @ the Polls implemented the marketing strategy "Hit them over the head" to develop a messaging blitzkrieg about the "downness" of elections. "We would put up hundreds of fliers at 2:00 in the morning on Sunday night, flooding the campus with marketing materials," said Gigi Traore, "so when people wake up it's like WOW! Where did this come from?!" Curtis Maples explained: "Utilizing pop culture, we created an implicit 'in-group' of people who care, thereby implicitly soliciting 'membership.' The main tactic was the 't-shirt game.' We would all wear a different t-shirt every other day or week, prompting people to guess what t-shirt we were going to wear next, thus inspiring interest in the shirt and subsequently the message." Power @ the Polls also brought celebrities and famous academics to the campuses, including Cornel West, Bow Wow, Jazmine Sullivan, LeBron James and Russell Simmons, using their cultural capital to promote voter engagement.

CONCLUSION

While conducting interviews for this article, we learned that in many cases if young people do not do it, it doesn't get done! In all of the cases above young people stepped up to the plate and filled a niche. If Power @ the Polls had not been at some historically Black colleges and universities, those students would have been left behind. If Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice had not stepped in and served as bridge-builders between two generations, who knows what might have happened in the case of Proposition 4 in California?

There were not enough resources available to organize our constituency and not enough invested to support our multiple forms of translation. We know that second-generation immigrant youth, youth of color and low-income youth will come out if we build with them. And they will come out to vote for a more progressive agenda. A core lesson from the 2008: *Young people of color are critical to the progressive infrastructure.*

*** Thanks to Steven Hightower, Amanda Wake, Gigi Traore, and Curtis Maples for the generous interviews.*

"Young Voters in the 2008 Presidential Election," The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, November 24, 2008, www.civicyouth.org/?p=324.

Thanks to Steven Hightower, Amanda Wake, Gigi Traore and Curtis Maples for the generous interviews.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Translating the Youthquake | By Camille Cyprian and Mattie Weiss

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were the main approaches and tactics of the youth organizations that were involved in the 2008 elections?
2. Cyprian and Weiss talk about youth as literal, political and cultural translators during the elections. Provide other examples of youth playing these roles.
3. SAFIRE developed a YouTube video about issues on the California ballot. What are some other ways that YouTube.com was used during the election to persuade young people to register and to vote?
4. How important do you think celebrities were in contributing their “cultural capital” to get out the youth vote?
5. What should politicians take away as critical lessons on how to connect with young voters for future elections?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Comparative demographics of the 2008 youth vote, by party, by state, by race, by education
2. Current work of Kaalay Vote, SAFIRE, League of Pissed of Voters and other organizations mentioned in the article
3. Organizations in your area that educate and mobilize young voters

Biracialism and the 2008 Elections

By Adrienne Maree Brown

BIRACIAL: ADJ.

consisting of, representing or combining members of two separate races

RACE: NOUN

1. a group of persons related by common descent or heredity.
2. a population so related.
3. anthropology.
 - a. any of the traditional divisions of humankind, the commonest being the Caucasian, Mongoloid, and Negro, characterized by supposedly distinctive and universal physical characteristics: no longer in technical use.
 - b. an arbitrary classification of modern humans, sometimes, esp. formerly, based on any or a combination of various physical characteristics, as skin color, facial form, or eye shape, and now frequently based on such genetic markers as blood groups.
 - c. a human population partially isolated reproductively from other populations, whose members share a greater degree of physical and genetic similarity with one another than with other humans.
4. a group of tribes or peoples forming an ethnic stock: the Slavic race.
5. any people united by common history, language, cultural traits, etc.: the Dutch race.
6. the human race or family; humankind: Nuclear weapons pose a threat to the race.

A BIRACIAL JOURNAL

As I write this, the dust has been clearing from the ebullient moment of election night 2008 for two months, and the American public is trying to wrap its millions of minds around the new reality of our leadership.

We have elected a Black president, and a great change has come. That is one clear story of what happened in 2008.

I want to explore some other stories about race in this election.

In the truest sense, we have a multicultural president, one who reflects the country he has led since January 2009. He is immigrant and internationalist and assimilated and integrated. He is Kenyan, English and Irish by blood, born in Hawaii, with time logged in Indonesia, Los Angeles and New York City on the way to Chicago and then DC.

Race, to me, is a step away from specifics, a step back from culture, a way to make all of humanity fit into a handful of groupings, a categorization of

melanin, geography and cultural history. It's not, as many still believe, a scientific categorization. And yet, there was probably no other categorization—including Democrat or Republican—that was as clearly defined in this election.

Obama is Black (and white), Black (and Euro-American).

Multiculturalism is a wonderful story for someone like Tiger Woods, who isn't representing anyone but himself. As someone from a multicultural background myself, I think the weaving of many cultures and experiences is what grounds Obama's diplomatic instinct and will have a lot to do with how Obama leads. But this election exposed that America isn't actually ready for an awareness of multiculturalism in leadership. The Obama campaign wasn't navigating the complex territory of a many-cultured background; everything was simplified to Black and white, Black or white.

While the white Anglo-Saxon settlers of this nation have managed to produce unique oppressive histories with those indigenous to this land, with the Irish and Italians who immigrated alongside and after them, with Chinese immigrants, Japanese, Korean, with Latino and Arab communities, there's a special bond in the history of slavery. More than mere hate or inequality, white people *owned* Black people, brought them like animals from another land to be worked to death building up a new white home. The trajectory from possession to president is thus particularly American for Blacks; from owner to Obama voter a particularly redemptive journey for white people.

The twist here is that Obama's Black heritage doesn't come from the Black American slave story—his father is Kenyan. Unlike most Blacks, Obama knows exactly where his African ancestry is from, knows his Kenyan family. We will see what this yields in terms of his leadership. I have always thought that it is not heritage alone, but lived experience and cultural choice that shape the identity of Blackness.

We are in a process that will move one step at a time. Once we jump the Black president broom, perhaps we will be able to really embrace multiculturalism, internationalism.

For now, we will explore how biracialism played out in this election.

It was biracialism that allowed a Black man to present not only familiarity and comfort with white culture, but identification with, and membership in, the white experience—an absolute necessity, at this point in our history, for an American president. The powerbrokers of this country are white. I believe a leader who didn't have an inside experience of whiteness would be a physical token of change, but unable to actually lead white communities to work with others in creating the changes the country needs.

In terms of the mainstream, Obama succeeded in a popular culture already primed by figures like Eartha

Kitt, Halle Berry, Mariah Carey. He had stories of his childhood, of the values instilled in him by his white mother and grandmother.

The mainstream has reached a point where it likes a little race sprinkled in for flavor or edge, but overall the content should not offend or challenge. Halle Berry doesn't play revolutionary Black roles, Mariah doesn't write political music. The dynamics of popularity, in culture and in politics, stay the same. We like our public officials more when they are attractive. We trust leadership more if they have the right amount of higher education but aren't so over-educated that they talk over our heads or make us feel dumb. Obama had these elements working in his favor, plus a family-pulling-itself-up-by-the-bootstraps story, and a huge, marvelous, shiver-inspiring capacity to speak to people's hearts.

The experience of being biracial has as much to do with class and educational experiences as it does with cultural heritage in the home and physical appearance. There are tons of people with a white parent or two who would never be considered for president because they couldn't hold their own across class lines. That takes education, and it's difficult for everyone to get that education with our under-funded public school system. Obama's education came from his experiences growing up in Hawaii and Indonesia, as well as his education at Columbia and Harvard Universities.

His Ivy League education and extra-national experience brought questions from the Black community: Was Barack Obama Black enough? Early in his presidential campaign, writers like Stanley Crouch and Debra Dickerson pointed out that Obama is not the descendent of West African slaves. And yet, there's the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, there's beautiful Michelle and her family, there's his Chicago organizing experience. And nothing unites us like racism. As participants at McCain-Palin rallies shouted "terrorist!" we bonded with "that guy."

He was Black enough for Oprah and Jesse Jackson to cry in Chicago on election night, and, perhaps surprising cynical Black Americans, he was Black enough for the majority of folks of all races to exclaim "change!" upon his win.

But there is a more telling question in terms of why he was able to succeed as no previous Black candidate had been able to: was he white enough?

Obama's campaign was not a race campaign, and the absence of race is actually a fairly white approach in and of itself. Most of the people who set their day jobs aside to campaign for Obama, either as paid staffers or as volunteers, were young, overwhelmingly white and/or middle- to upper-middle-class. That was in part because of campaign culture, where the jobs are quick and the pay rate is very low, a reality not unique to the Obama campaign. That said, this reality excluded Obama supporters who couldn't afford to

drop everything and work on the campaign.

This also reflected the disillusionment of many people, particularly Black people, with the electoral process after the 2000 and 2004 elections. While Obama's campaign slowly won over people who had been burned by Florida by recounts, by partisan politics, by the corrupt electoral process, his staff reflected the young, white, educated, pro-Democrat hopefuls.

Those who worked the campaign expressed a wide range of feelings—from disappointment to surprise to strategic respect—about the absence of race as a central issue within the campaign strategy. Obama was running as a Black candidate but was savvy enough not to harp on it in mixed company. When people can see your race but not experience you as other than them—can see you as part of their normalized, abstract, hopeful and positive vision—then you have slipped into the standard American experience, the absence of stark difference, into a culture of sameness and integration.

Was he white enough? Yes. *He* was, but what about his friends?

The biggest race moment of the election centered on the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, who entered the scene like a lion, tearing at the nation's self-image with sermons that shocked the mainstream, though they reflected the way many Black people—in or out of church—think about race in this country. He was a legitimizing element for many of those Black people and progressives most critical of Obama.

Initially, Obama claimed his relationship with Wright and gave the most significant speech on race that a mainstream political figure has given in my lifetime. In that speech, he said he could no more disown this "fiery" Black pastor than he could disown his white grandmother.

But then, Obama did disown this fiery Black pastor. He expressed his whiteness in what he was willing to give up—the blackest parts of himself. On April 29, 2008, in a speech given in Winston-Salem, Obama said he was "offended" and "saddened by the spectacle," that he "didn't recognize" the Reverend Jeremiah Wright as the man who had inspired his religious faith 20 years before (and held it until very recently).

Deep familiarity with whiteness is perhaps the only way that someone physically identified as a Black person could grasp the deep shock that mainstream America felt when listening to Wright. That same familiarity allowed Obama to understand when it became strategically necessary to throw his pastor overboard. This was the only possible pragmatic move, the rite of passage, the required sacrifice. This was Obama saying, "I'm going all in."

White America is an ideal that can only be maintained with a healthy degree of distance, denial and an outright desire not to see the ways in which it is failing. The America I identify with more is an honorable, self-critical democracy where injustice is

highlighted by citizen action and honesty, where we seek to increase our humanity. Wright was beloved by his congregation because of the ways in which he said, "Look at who we are, and look at where we are."

And if Wright hadn't burst onto the national scene, Obama would never have been able to make a speech on the distance between the vision of equality and the race reality of modern-day America and say: "This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected."

* * *

We have two major stories in the United States. One is the story of democracy; the other is the story of race. In the story of democracy, all men are created equal, there is equal opportunity to pursue the dream of life, liberty and happiness, unhindered by religious persecution. The story of race makes most of the story of democracy an unachievable dream. It is a delegitimizing addendum to the key elements of democracy—all men are created equal, except darker men. There is equal opportunity, for white men.

Darker men have the opportunity to work for whites in as many ways as they want. Darker has included indigenous, Jewish, Italian, Irish, Black, Asian, Arab, Latino, Hispanic. Now the role of service has shifted in a way we have yet to grasp—a way that may take years to fully unfold and that may overwhelm us. What we do not want to see is Barack stepping into the role of "first Black president" without bringing the Black cultural experience to bear in his leadership, without bringing a Black critique to policy and society.

Is Barack leading, serving, proving a point, or all of the above? Is he bringing facilitative leadership to the highest office in the land, shifting the power dynamic from servant to service for good? Only time knows, and I am aware of my own hope that, in the long run, he will be able to lead with more culture than he was able to bring into his campaign. I want to see him facilitative and healing and directional and able to bring his full heritage and lived experience as a biracial, even a multiracial, leader.

I've often heard that the mixing of races is the only way towards peace and evolution—we will leave inequality behind us as love and family supercede ignorance and fear. However, if the election of Obama is evidence of how biracialism and multiracialism and racial justice and cultural awareness play out on a major stage, we will become masters of the tender practice of being our race, while disappearing our culture. We have to resist the pressure to quietly set aside the elements—the gifts! the points of view!—that make each culture unique, in the search for that perfect center we can call American. It's time to tell the full story of our American identities. We can advance the path that Obama has begun and truly redefine the American Way.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Biracialism and the 2008 Elections | By Adrienne Maree Brown

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Brown asserts that America still sees things in Black and white and is not “ready for an awareness of multiculturalism in leadership.” Do you agree? Why? Why not?
2. Brown characterizes Tiger Woods as representing only himself. Is representing only oneself possible in a society in which race is such a significant factor? Is representing only oneself a problem?
3. Why do you think it mattered to some people that Obama traces his Black ancestry to Kenya and not to Africans who were enslaved in America?
4. The “one drop rule,” an artifact of slavery, held that anyone with even one drop of “Black blood” would be considered Black (and therefore subject to enslavement). How has the acceptance of that “rule” impacted those people that identify as biracial or multiracial?
5. How did President Obama’s time in Chicago shape his Black identity, and why was that important to his campaign?
6. Brown thinks that Obama was both Black enough for Blacks and white enough for whites. What does she mean by this?
7. Was denouncing Jeremiah Wright the only option for Obama on his path to victory? What else could he have done in those circumstances?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Changes in the U.S. Census categorization of racial groups
2. Political and cultural organizations that support or advocate for people who identify as biracial or multiracial



Race, the Changing Electorate and the Electoral College

By Bob Wing

Barack Obama's victory is, indeed, an historic breakthrough for U.S. politics. In a country that retained a system of legalized racism until just 40 years ago, and that was founded on white supremacy, black slavery and Native genocide, the election of the first Black president is cause for jubilation.

The significance of Obama's victory is accentuated by the fact that not only is he an outstanding individual with liberal politics and a community organizer's instincts, but he is also leading a potentially historic and progressive realignment of U.S. politics.

Such realignment could not come at a better time. Beset by an economic crisis of historic proportions, now is the time for progressive structural changes to the international and national socio-economic landscape. But such changes will be impossible without enormous political strength.

Whether President Obama can help orchestrate a turnaround of the economic crisis now facing the country—indeed the world—will be revealed in the coming years. But he has already made a major contribution to changing the historic pattern of U.S. politics, a pattern that was set by slavery and enabled conservative Republicans to dominate the presidency for the last 40 years.

THE COLOR OF ELECTION 2008

The enormity of Obama's victory has led to much hyperbole about the end of racism and the advent

of a colorblind society. This notion deserves closer examination lest Obama's victory become an obstacle, rather than an opening, to future racial progress.

Much of the press has focused on celebrating the willingness of many whites to elect a Black president. But just how colorblind is the U.S. electorate? Despite the fact that the Republicans had failed miserably, even on their own terms, and run the country virtually into the ground, whites still voted for McCain by 55 to 43. Blacks voted for Obama by 95 to 4, Latinos went for Obama by 66 to 32, and Asians backed Obama by 61 to 35.¹

In 2008, the white vote was virtually identical to election 2000 and continued to exert a strong conservative pull on the electorate, while the votes of peoples of color and young people of all races headed powerfully in a more progressive direction.

The color lines, in life and politics, are alive and well.

Indeed, people of color made the biggest shifts in their voting between 2004 and 2008. It was they who proved decisive in Obama's victory. Left to white voters, John McCain would have won a landslide, 12-point victory.

1. Unless otherwise noted all voting figures are drawn from the National Exit Polls for 2000, 2004 and 2008, as reported by CNN.

Blacks voted for Obama by an astonishing 95 to 4, a 14-point swing for the Democrats compared to 2004.² Many a pundit has dismissed this result as a knee-jerk racial solidarity vote for Obama. How soon they forget that the majority of Black voters favored Hillary Clinton for the many months leading up to the Iowa primary.

Much of the mainstream media declared that Latinos were too racist to vote for Obama. They pointed to the large Latino primary vote for Clinton as “proof.”

Latinos resoundingly put the lie to these cynics by voting for Obama by 66 to 32, a huge 16-point swing to the Democrats compared to 2004. Even a 58 percent majority of Cubans in Florida, traditionally solidly Republican, went for Obama.

Latinas led the way toward Obama, casting 68 percent of their votes for him and only 30 percent for McCain. Latino voters under 30 went for Obama by 76 to 24, perhaps indicating the direction of future Latino voting patterns.

Asians swung Democratic by 14 points over 2004, voting for Obama 61 to 35. The political trajectory of Asian voters has been striking. In 1992, Bill Clinton received only 31 percent of the Asian vote. Since then, Asians have steadily moved Democratic, reaching a high point this year.

So much for the pundits who believed that Latinos and Asians would never unite behind Black leadership. These results amount to a massive progressive motion by people of color.

Meanwhile the white vote swung toward Obama and the Democrats by five points compared to 2004. White voters under 30 were the only age group among whites to favor Obama. They voted for him by 54 to 44. All other whites voted for McCain by about 57 to 41. One hopes that these young white voters will hold to this pattern in the future.

The most anemic swing was made by white women, who voted for McCain by 53 to 46, moving a mere four points toward the Democrats. This was particularly disappointing in light of their ten point swing to Bush from 2000 to 2004, a change that accounted for Bush’s victory in that year.

White men favored McCain by a bigger margin, 57 to 41, but this represented a sizable nine-point swing to the Democrats compared to 2004, when they voted for Bush overwhelmingly, 62 to 37.

Overall, Obama carried the white vote in only 18 of the 50 states, mostly in the Northeast and the West Coast.

THE CHANGING COLOR OF THE ELECTORATE

From a long-range point of view, the change in the racial composition of the electorate as a whole is perhaps even more important than the shifts towards the Democrats. In 1976, whites constituted 90 percent of the vote; in 2000, they still accounted for 81 percent. In 2008, the white share of the vote fell to 74 percent, quite a dramatic change in a short time.

Just as surprising, the main group increasing its share of the electorate is not Latinos, but Blacks. Blacks constituted 30 percent of all new voters in 2004, and an even greater mobilization this year brought them to 13 percent of the overall vote, a 30 percent increase over 2000.

The sheer numbers of Latino and Asian voters have risen significantly over the same period, but their percentage share of the overall vote is virtually unchanged since 2000: nine percent for Latinos and two percent for Asians.³

Surprisingly, the percentage of the electorate that is under 30 years of age, regardless of color, also remained stable, at 17-18 percent. However, these voters increased their Democratic vote by 12 points compared to 2004, voting for Obama by 66 to 32. Young voters were also the main corps of Obama field organizers, and their energy gave the campaign much of its movement-like quality.

HISTORIC REALIGNMENT?

The true maverick in the 2008 campaign was not McCain, who pursued the same old reactionary Republican Southern Strategy, but Obama whose bold strategy of fighting for the South and the Southwest, indeed, all 50 states—ran counter to all previous electoral “common sense.”

His success was both astonishing and history-

2. I calculate the “swing” or “change” in the vote in the traditional but rather confusing manner as the change in the vote differential.

For example, in 2004 blacks voted Democratic by 88 to 11, a 77 point differential. In 2008, they voted Democratic by 95 to 4, a 91 point differential. The vote differential thus changed from 77 points to 91 points, so I report a 14-point “swing” or “change.”

3. No national exit poll numbers are available about Arab or Native American voters for any year.



THE COLOR LINES, IN LIFE AND POLITICS, ARE ALIVE AND WELL.

making. He won the southwestern states of Nevada, Colorado and New Mexico, and the former Confederate slave states of Virginia, North Carolina and Florida, as well as former slave states Maryland and Delaware. The Latino vote was decisive for Obama in Nevada, New Mexico, Florida and Colorado, and the Black vote was central to his victories in North Carolina and Virginia.

In all, nine states switched from red to blue from 2004 to 2008: Virginia, North Carolina, New Mexico, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Ohio, New Hampshire and Iowa. Obama lost Missouri by the narrowest of margins.

The historic nature of these victories is brought into sharp relief by the accompanying maps.

The first is the map of slave versus free states and territories just prior to the Civil War. The other is the electoral map of the 2004 election. Depressingly, they are almost identical: the former slave areas are almost universally Republican, and the former free areas, with a couple of exceptions, are Democratic.

Almost 150 years after the abolition of slavery, the political patterns wrought by the “peculiar institution” still shape U.S. politics. Barack Obama’s campaign may mark the beginning of the end of this historic pattern, with tremendous implications for the future of U.S. politics. The main window into this change is the Electoral College.

ELECTORAL COLLEGE: A PILLAR OF RACISM

It is not so surprising that slavery set the pattern of U.S. politics if one knows that the Electoral College itself was a product of slavery.

The Founding Fathers, led by slaveholders such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe, invented the Electoral College out of thin air to serve their interests.

They codified the notorious idea that slaves were non-humans and thus deserving of no constitutional or human rights. The one exception to this rule was the curious stipulation that, for one narrow purpose, slaves were considered to be three-fifths of a human

being. Slaves were to be counted as three-fifths of a person solely for the purpose of determining how many congressional representatives each state would be allotted. The three-fifths rule vastly increased the slave-state power in the House of Representatives and therefore the Congress.

The Electoral College, in which each state receives a number of Electors equal to their congressional delegation, was invented as the institutional means to transfer that same pro-slavery congressional allocation to determining the presidency. The slaveholders proceeded to hold the presidency for 32 of the country’s first 36 years. With the election of Abraham Lincoln, the first U.S. president to oppose the expansion of slavery, the South, used to wielding political power through the selective enumeration of slaves, promptly seceded.

Since the end of slavery, the Electoral College has remained a racist and conservative instrument. It has given the Republicans a running head start to win the presidency ever since reactionary Southerners switched en masse from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in protest of the 1960s civil rights acts.

As then-Republican strategist Kevin Phillips put it in 1970, “The more Negroes who register as Democrats in the South, the sooner the Negrophobe whites will quit the Democrats and become Republicans. That’s where the votes are.”

Based on that switch, the Republicans adopted the notorious Southern Strategy that has enabled them to dominate the presidency for the last 40 years. The Republicans came to count on fashioning a winning combination of the solidly Republican white southern voters with conservative and moderate whites in the Midwest and Southwest, through barely coded racist appeals to white crossover voters who came to be known as Reagan Democrats.

The Southern Strategy has been the glue with which the Republican Party has united powerful corporate capitalists to conservative white workers, farmers, small business owners and suburban homeowners.

The racial bias embedded in the Electoral College system is the structural basis of the Republican’s



Southern Strategy. The winner-take-all Electoral College system ensures, even requires, that about half of all voters of color be marginalized or totally ignored.⁴

About 53 percent of all Blacks live in the southern states, and in 2000 and 2004 they voted about 90 percent Democratic. However, in those elections white Republicans out-voted them in every Southern state and every border state except Maryland.

As a result, every single southern Electoral College vote was awarded to Bush. While whites voted 54-42 for Bush nationally in 2000, Southern whites gave him over 70 percent of their votes in both 2000 and 2004. They thus completely erased the massive Southern Black vote for the Democrats in that region.

The result was the same as if Blacks, and other Democrats, in the South had not voted at all.

Similarly negated were the votes of millions of Native American and Latino voters who live in overwhelmingly white Republican states like Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, Utah, the Dakotas, Montana and Texas. The tyranny of the white, conservative majority prevailed.

Further, the peoples of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa and Guam, territories ruled by the U.S., get no Electoral College votes at all, though Puerto Rico's population is greater than that of nearly half of the U.S. states.

Compounding the reactionary and pro-Republican bias of the Electoral College, the system gives as much as three times as much weight to the mainly conservative and white Republicans in the rural states compared to states with large, racially diverse and majority-Democratic populations.

Since each state has a minimum of two Senators and one Representative, the states with the smallest populations have three Electoral College votes.

For example, Wyoming has a little more than 240,000 voters and has three Electoral College votes—one for every 80,000 or so voters. By comparison, large-population states like California have about one Electoral College vote for every 220,000 voters.

Thus, the Electoral College system violates the principle of one person, one vote, drastically undermines the impact of the Black vote and gives the Republicans a major advantage in presidential contests. Its abolition should be a key part of the progressive agenda.

ORGANIZING REMAINS THE KEY

Although the political dynamics of each of the nine states that turned from red to blue in 2008 need to be examined closely in their own right, it is likely that a minimum of three or four will move decisively into the Democratic column. A number of others that swung Democratic in 2008 have moved from being solidly red states to battleground states. The solid Republican South and Southwest may be a thing of the past. In the wake of Obama's hard-won victories, the Democrats have no excuse for essentially conceding these regions, as they have done for decades.

This will qualitatively shift the Electoral College math. Since 1968, the Electoral College has clearly favored the Republicans, and the Democrats had to pull off an upset to win. Indeed, Bill Clinton won only because of the third-party candidacy of Ross Perot. In the future, it may be that the Electoral College math will favor the Democrats and that the Republicans can only win by staging an upset.

Just as important, for the first time in U.S. history the two political parties clearly represent the two broad wings of U.S. politics. At the national level, the southern reactionaries no longer hold the Democratic Party hostage.

This augurs well for the possibility that an Obama presidency may be able to gather the political strength to undertake a major restructuring of the economy in favor of working people and people of color in general, and to reorganize our foreign policy in a positive direction.

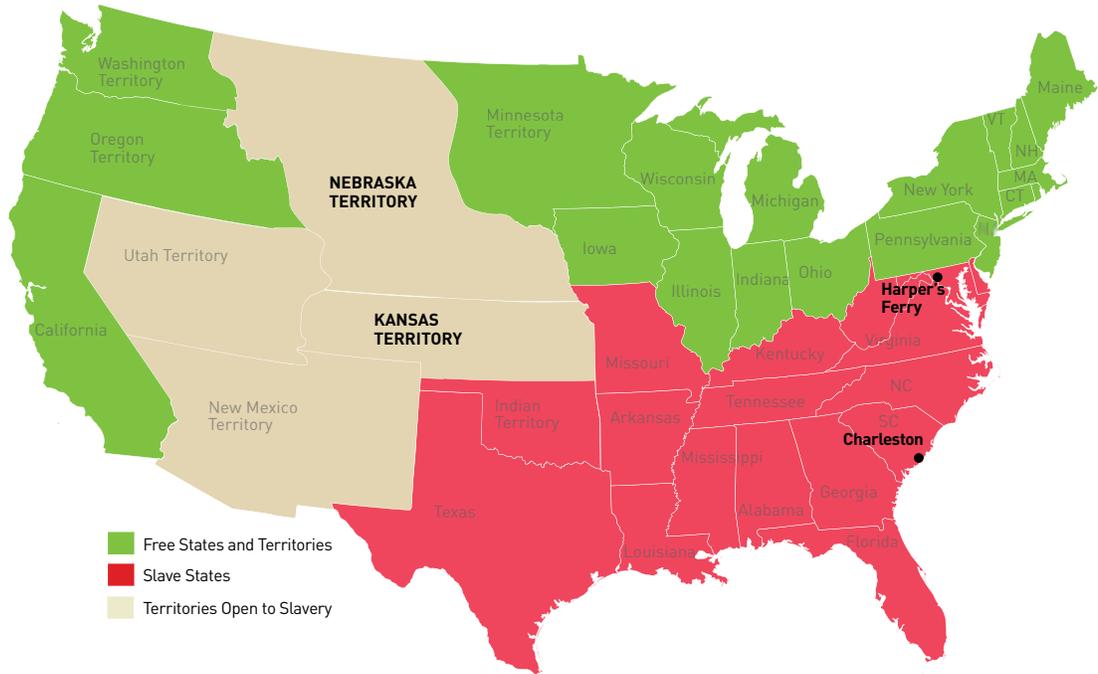
However, there is still a major political element missing from the equation: the relative lack of a powerful independent people's movement. In the 1930s, the union movement—especially the newly formed, radical CIO—was key to the New Deal. In the 1960s, the civil rights movement was the driving force of the War on Poverty.

Herein lies the principal task of all progressives in the coming period: to forge powerful, independent, mass movements and organizations that can help shape the Obama coalition in a progressive way. Our relative success or failure at this task will determine the future of the U.S. and the world every bit as much as President Obama, himself.

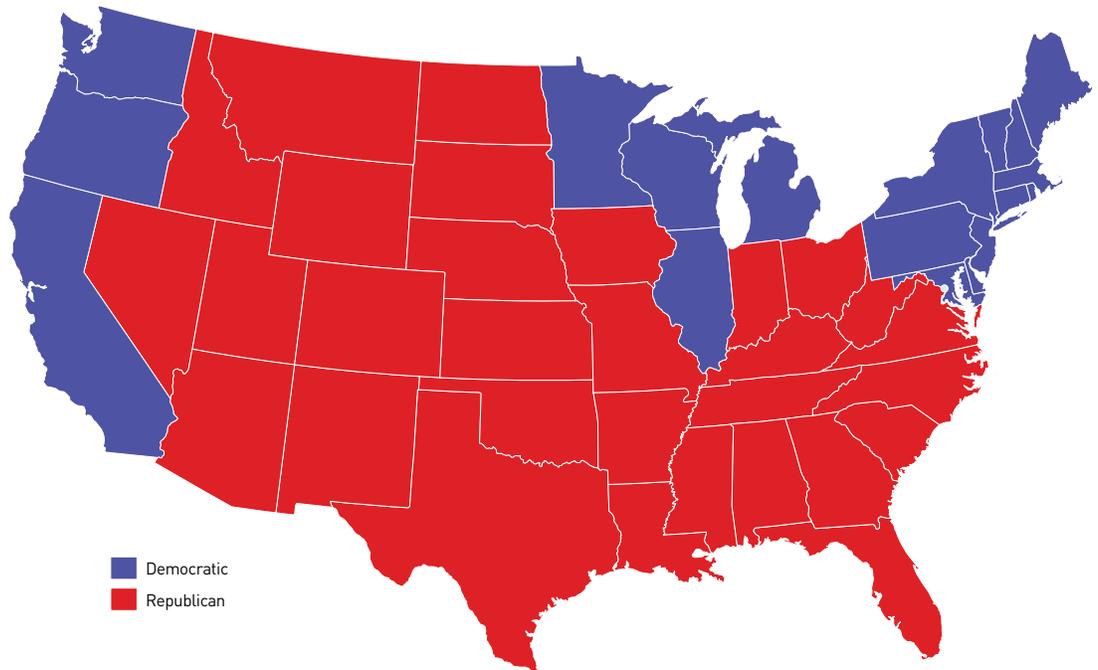
4. Only Nebraska and Maine allocate their electoral votes more or less proportionate to the vote rather than on a statewide winner-take-all basis.



Free States and Slave States, before the Civil War



Map of 2004 Election Results



Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Race, the Changing Electorate and the Electoral College | By Bob Wing

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Wing states that Obama is leading “a potentially historic and progressive realignment of U.S. politics.” What evidence does he present to support this view? Do you agree with his opinion?
2. How was the color line manifested in 2008 voting patterns?
3. How did changing demographics and the strong preference for Obama among people of color affect the shift of red states to blue states?
4. Wing compares the map showing former slave-holding states with the map showing solidly Republican states in the 2004 election. Why do you think former slave-holding states are more consistently conservative than other states?
5. Wing characterizes the Electoral College as an instrument of white racial control of national politics. Does the evidence he presents support this view? In light of Obama’s win, do you think the Electoral College is still a “racist and conservative instrument”?
6. Discuss Wing’s contention that building a strong, independent peoples’ movement is a necessary component to advancing a progressive agenda in this period.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Obama campaign strategy in Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado
2. Political history of the three-fifths rule
3. Organizations working for reform of the Electoral College system
4. Differences in racial voting patterns among the southern states

Obama as Enigma

A “New” Regime for Muslim and Arab Americans?

by Sunaina Maira

Scene 1:

A much-discussed and televised moment in the 2008 presidential campaign happened at a John McCain town hall meeting on October 10, 2008 in |Lakeville, Minnesota. A white woman said to the Republican candidate, “I gotta ask you a question. I can’t trust Obama. I’ve read about him...and he’s not, er... he’s an Arab.” McCain took the microphone from her, shaking his head, and said, “No, ma’am, he’s not. He’s a decent family man, citizen, that I happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues.” Less discussed is the fact that Obama actually thanked McCain for this problematic defense.

Scene 2:

Rewind to June 18, 2008, Detroit. At a rally for the Democratic candidate, two Muslim American women in hijab (head scarves), Hebba Aref and Shimaa Abdelfadeel, were told by the Obama campaign that women in hijab had not been invited to the rally and could not sit behind the podium unless they uncovered their heads. Aref, a lawyer, was not just an Obama supporter but, ironically, said she had defended Obama against rumors that he was Muslim. The Obama campaign apologized, and the next day the candidate was photographed with a group of supporters, including a woman in hijab.

Scene 3:

Fast-forward to December 2009 and the Israeli assault on the civilian population of Gaza, imprisoned by Israel in a U.S.-backed blockade that controls the air, land and sea borders of the Gaza Strip. By the end of the three-week-long massacre, more than 1,400 Palestinians have been slaughtered, 400 of whom were children. Schools, a university and United Nations relief agency shelters are bombed. Obama does not say a word.

What do these incidents and statements, or silences, tell us about the ways in which anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia were staged during the campaign,

both concerning Muslim and Arab American communities, and Obama himself? And what does this suggest for the racial and global politics of the new regime in relation to the concerns of Muslim and Arab Americans? Since Barack Hussein Obama launched his presidential campaign, debates have raged about who the real Obama is and what his election means for Arab and Muslim Americans. Liberals and conservatives alike have argued about the direction in which Obama will take the United States, and progressives—including many Arab, South Asian and Muslim American activists—have rallied behind the call for “hope” and “change.” Obama’s presidency poses an array of questions for Arab, South Asian and Muslim communities in the U.S., related to both their own political futures in this country and to U.S. racial politics and imperial policies. The scenes described above are not isolated moments or exceptional incidents but indicative of a deeper contradiction in Obama’s rhetoric and policy that has begun to (slowly) puncture the fervent Obamania that swept the country.

The fact that Obama’s father’s family is Muslim, that his (strategically downplayed) middle name is Arabic and that he spent part of his childhood in a Muslim country—Indonesia—raised hopes for many, in the U.S. and in Arab and Muslim countries, that



Obama would not just be sympathetic to the concerns of Arabs and Muslims—who were the bull’s eye of the neoconservatives’ War on Terror—but also support their struggles. But the Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism that played itself out in the course of the campaign forces us to consider the paradox of these hopes for real change that Muslim and Arab Americans can actually believe in. Furthermore, the concerns in these communities about Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism need to be situated in the global context of U.S. policies in the Middle East and South Asia and in a larger landscape of race politics in the U.S., so that racism against Muslim and Arab Americans is not disconnected from the ongoing racism, criminalization, violence and militarism of American society.

The fact that Obama is the first Black president of the U.S. is certainly a milestone in U.S. history and should serve as a reminder to immigrants, such as those from West or South Asia, that most of us are relatively recent newcomers to a long, ongoing struggle over inclusion and exclusion, belonging and citizenship in the U.S. At the same time, Obama’s invocations of the American Dream resonate powerfully with those who see this country as a mythologized land of freedom and democracy, and of achievement, mobility and success. For many Blacks, Obama represents the symbolic achievement of the first Black president in U.S. history, the first Black family in the seat of power in the White House. But some also point out that he is not a Black American who traces his genealogy to those who were enslaved in the U.S., but rather to the narrative of immigration and “multicultural” America. His multiracial identity speaks to a long tradition of mixed-race Americans, particularly mixed Black/white Americans, serving as the bridge between the black/white polarity of U.S. race politics, but also assuaging the anxieties of white Americans about the specter of losing white privilege.

Obama’s skillful oratory was strategic in evoking the notion of a “post-racial America,” a neoconservative vision in which racism is presumed to no longer exist in a “colorblind” society. While Obama acknowledged the challenges facing those who are marginalized and impoverished, he did so not by challenging the basic premise of the American Dream, but by rehabilitating the founding mythologies of a nation purport-

edly built on democracy and freedom, not through genocide and enslavement. Obama’s political vision departs from the critiques of earlier generations of Black activists who rejected the myths of U.S. freedom and democracy and challenged the foundational narratives of a nation built solely by willing immigrants and industrious pioneers. Those activists were part of movements that fought to reveal that this country was built through settler colonialism, slave labor and the dispossession of native peoples, and has a long history of the exclusion of immigrants through discriminatory immigration and citizenship legislation that affected South and West Asians, among many others.

Obama distanced himself from these histories, most clearly from the specter of Black nationalism and militant civil rights leaders. He disowned his own pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, who represented a more uncompromising and threatening critique of U.S. nationalism, and a discourse of spiritual and political resistance in which Blacks find succor in the Black church. As Jonathan Farley succinctly pointed out, “Just because you are a first for Blacks, doesn’t mean that Blacks are first for you.”¹

In fact, the power of Obama’s appeal, in addition to his charisma and eloquence (not to mention his ability to speak grammatical English, after eight years of Bush-isms!), was underscored in a conversation I overheard between two airline stewards, a Puerto Rican and an Black, on a trip to southern California. The Latina spoke about how her mother voted for the first time in many years, suggesting that, because Obama was mixed-race, Puerto Ricans could relate to him because he was “mulatto.” The Black woman did not respond, but her friend went on, “You know, he’s a universal man.” That simple statement helped shed light on the ways in which Obama has a flexible persona that fits all structures, as Palestinian writer and politician Azmi Bishara noted, using rhetoric that allows him to appeal to whites as well as Blacks, liberals as well as leftists, immigrants as well as citizens, Muslims, Christians, Jews and Hindus alike. Obama has been produced and packaged like a cipher, or as Norman Solomon, author and media critic observes, a “Rorschach test” onto which a range of Americans—as well as others—project their own hopes, fantasies and desires for the future.

1. Jonathan Farley, “The New Black Politics” (originally published in *The Crimson*) February 4, 2009. www.blackagenda.com/



The hopes that people have of Obama and the desires for a change from Bush and the neoconservative regime of anti-democratic and militaristic programs are real. The trouble is that Obama's actual policy positions, as opposed to his rhetoric, do not represent a real departure from the project of U.S. military, economic and political domination. His center-right cabinet choices make this only too apparent (noting that the center in the U.S. has increasingly shifted to the right), from the selection of Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel—who formerly served as a volunteer with the Israeli military—to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Larry Summers (National Council of Economic Advisors), and others who represent continuity with, rather than change from, previous Democratic and Republican policies of war-mongering and neoliberal capitalism.

Another infamous incident that revealed the racial politics of the new administration in relation to Arab Americans and Israel/Palestine was when Rahm Emanuel's father (who fought in the Irgun, a Jewish terrorist group, until 1948) commented on his son: "Obviously he'll influence the president to be pro-Israel. Why wouldn't he? What is he, an Arab? He's not going to be mopping floors at the White House." His son's response, after the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee complained, was to apologize and note, "These are not the values upon which I was raised or those of my family."² This is an astounding remark—does Emanuel's simply stating that his family is not racist make it so, erasing the fact that his father openly expressed his anti-Arab racism? There is also the troubling fact that Emanuel co-authored a bill defending Israel against a World Court opinion criticizing Israel's apartheid wall ("security fence").

Yet Obama's choice of Emanuel as a close advisor

is not surprising. During the campaign, Obama made very clear his allegiances to the Israel lobby and the American Israel Political Action Committee instead of taking a firm stance against settler colonial policies, occupation, sanctions and collective punishment in Palestine—all policies that have been denounced by the world community and by almost every member of the United Nations except the U.S. and Israel. Given this loyalty, it was disappointing but not surprising to witness Obama's silence during the massacre in Gaza this past winter. His refusal to condemn the assaults was supposedly because he was still President-elect. Yet this circumstance did not prevent him from issuing a statement of sympathy and condemnation of the attacks in Mumbai, India in November 2008—as he should have done. But do Palestinian/Arab lives not matter to the President as well?

For Arab and Muslim Americans, there is great hope for a change in policy from the aggressive and pre-emptive military interventions of the Bush regime's War on Terror, but in reality Obama's stated positions are to continue the War on Terror, if with a different strategic approach and in a different primary theater of war. Although Obama has called for a partial withdrawal of "combat troops" in Iraq, he still supports a continued military and economic presence there, including mercenaries and multinational corporations. Obama has not been willing to reduce the Pentagon's budget and wants to expand the military. More immediately, he has announced that he will shift the major front of the War on Terror from Iraq to Afghanistan and Pakistan. In fact, Obama was the only presidential candidate who declared that he would wage a unilateral war against Pakistan, under the guise of "rooting out terrorists." This is the very same logic that Bush used to wage war against

2. "Emanuel Calls ADC to Repudiate Negative Comments About Arabs." November 13, 2008. www.adc.org/index.php?id=3381



Iraq and Afghanistan, where civil society has been destroyed, and the Taliban has re-emerged. How a continuation of the same policy of military force, with even less investment in rebuilding the shattered infrastructure of a country destroyed by 25 years of war and violence, is going to bring peace and democracy to Afghanistan will be lost on anyone who genuinely opposes war. Furthermore, one of the first attacks that the U.S. military launched immediately after Obama came into office was a missile strike on northwest Pakistan, where the U.S. has been engaged in direct as well as indirect attacks, some using unmanned drones that have killed innocent civilians, further enraging the local population.

Although Obama ordered the closure of the Guantanamo detention facility during his first few days in office—not surprising, since the prison has provoked such serious negative publicity and condemnation of the U.S. around the world, as well as increasing domestic criticism—he has yet to announce what he plans to do with the detainees. Furthermore, the new President has revealed no plans to shut down Baghram prison in Afghanistan—where illegal torture is practiced outside of the media’s attention and which is sure to see much more of this if the War on Terror is revived in Afghanistan—or to close Abu Ghraib, now functioning under a new name. Another less-discussed fact is that Obama’s administration has backed the Bush administration’s policies on “extraordinary rendition.” In fact, the opposition to the U.S.-backed regime of General Musharraf in Pakistan was sparked in part by outrage over the illegal detention of Pakistanis who have disappeared under the U.S.-backed War on Terror.

What was clear in the Obama era that swept the country is that many progressives and even leftists were willing to let Obama off the hook on foreign policy, in effect sacrificing the lives of innocent Pakistanis, Afghans and Palestinians for a sense of relief from the outrage, guilt and anxiety of the Bush years, and the critique of America it generated worldwide. Americans wanted to feel good about being American again, but at what cost? This is the painful paradox of Obama-ism. For Muslim and Arab Americans, the contradictions were also apparent and difficult

to rationalize. Sharif Aref, the brother of one of the women who was removed from Obama’s rally, was careful to say their complaint was not a “slam on Obama,” but in the same statement pointed out that Islamophobia is rampant and evident even in Obama rallies. Christina Zola of the ADC noted: “This is what Arab Americans put up with every day.”³

Some will argue that Obama had to take these policy positions and to distance himself from Muslims and Arab Americans during his presidential campaign because he needed to get elected. There was no way that he could express the politics of a progressive community organizer, especially since he is of African descent, if he wished to be President. However, this instrumentalist justification of what was essentially an increasingly centrist platform also reveals the limited political horizon of electoral politics, where electability is allowed to supersede political vision, and a corporate-lobby-sponsored campaign appears to be outside the “system.”

The scenes I described at the beginning of the essay may appear trivial, but they are part of a larger climate in which suspicion and violence against Muslims and Arabs is implicitly and explicitly sanctioned by the state. Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism in the U.S. are deeply intertwined with U.S. imperial interventions in the Middle East and South Asia. It is the repression of resistance to U.S. policies in these regions that underlies the construction of Muslims and Arabs as “enemy aliens” and the surveillance, detentions and deportations of Muslim and Arab Americans, both before and after 9/11. U.S. support of Israel and U.S. strategic interests in “remaking the Middle East” and South-West Asia so the region is hospitable to U.S. and Israeli hegemony are key to both the domestic and foreign targeting of Muslims and Arabs as fanatical “terrorists” who oppose U.S.-style modernity and democracy. To confront anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism, we need to confront the root of these policies and challenge the racial thinking that justifies them. It is imperative that those concerned about racial and social justice are not lulled by false hopes but continue to challenge U.S. imperialism at home and overseas.

3. “Obama Workers Snub Two Muslims,” Christi Parsons and Katie Fretland. June 19, 2008. www.chicagotribune.com/news/nation-world/.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Obama as Enigma: A “New” Regime for Muslim and Arab Americans?

By Sunaina Maira

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is problematic about the way McCain “defended” Obama against the idea that he is a Muslim?
2. Why do you think the Obama campaign was worried about the presence of women in hijab at their campaign rallies?
3. Maira states that “Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism need to be situated in the global context of U.S. policies in the Middle East and South Asia.” Why is this broader context important? How does U.S. foreign policy affect attitudes towards Muslim and Arab Americans?
4. Maira contrasts Obama’s embrace of the nation’s “founding mythologies” with the critiques of earlier generations of Black activists, including Reverend Wright. Why are these founding mythologies so powerful? How did Obama demonstrate his embrace of these mythologies?
5. How did Obama’s actions during the campaign and in the early days of his presidency demonstrate the importance of the strategic alliance between the U.S. and Israel?
6. Maira challenges the idea that Obama represents fundamental change. What is her evidence? What is your thinking on this question?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Arab and Muslim-American organizations that combat racism and discrimination
2. Arab-American voting patterns in 2008
3. Rise in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim violence post 9/11
4. Obama’s approach to foreign policy—continuity or change?

Swinging Virginia in Roanoke

By Gary Younge

Onzlee Ware sympathizes with Barack Obama. As the Black representative to the Virginia House of Delegates from the overwhelmingly white 11th district, he knows a thing or two about getting white people to vote for a Black candidate.

“You don’t want to be seen as a 100% Black candidate,” he said, his office walls emblazoned with pictures of Muhammad Ali knocking down Joe Frasier and Ware with Obama, Jesse Jackson and Brown v. Board of Education lawyer Oliver Hill, among others. “You want to be seen as a candidate who cares about and supports the issues of all the people. But the danger in that is this: If you don’t walk that line carefully and you seem to be all-inclusive all the time, you tend to turn off Black people, because they will feel that you’re not paying them enough attention.”

Less than a month before the election, this was Ware’s greatest fear for Barack Obama in the city of Roanoke. Not that Blacks were not excited about this election or Obama’s candidacy—they most definitely were. The enthusiasm was so close to the surface that you could pretty much stop any Black person of pretty much any age or class on the street and talk to them about the election. You didn’t have to ask them who they were going to support. It was understood.

Yet there was widespread concern among the city’s Black leaders that the campaign was alienating members of the Black community, ignoring their local knowledge and disregarding their connections. Most people expected Obama to have something of a race problem in a town like Roanoke, which nestles in the Shenandoah Valley in between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Appalachias. Few expected it would be with Blacks.

But it was clear in the days leading up to the general election that there was a problem. Though Blacks comprise half the Democratic base, their presence was

relatively scarce at many campaign events, and they were not represented in the campaign office—all of the staffers were white. When the Democrats put together a team for a televised public debate in town, it was all white. When I attended a Democratic meeting at the local high school, whose student population was roughly half Black, it, too, was all white.

It soon became apparent that for all the cross-racial support Obama received in Roanoke—and it was substantial—most of it was accompanied by precious little political education where race is concerned. One man I met who was supporting Obama was a fierce defender of the honor and character of Confederate general Robert E. Lee. Other volunteers decried Blacks who did not volunteer for the campaign as lazy and undeserving. This was not necessarily a majority view, but it was common enough.

Apart from garden-variety racial bias on the part of volunteers and staffers, Black disaffection from the campaign apparatus was stoked by cross-racial generational tensions, as well. “The older crowd just don’t connect with a 20-year-old white person telling a 50-year-old Black person what to do,” explained Ware. “Especially how to run their own communities. And then they get discouraged and go back to their communities, and they don’t come back.”

“I don’t think it’s intentional,” continued Ware, who had a good relationship with the local campaign. “But sometimes intentions are not really the issue. Some Black people have felt a little left out.”

Ware himself was deeply involved with the campaign and praised its staffers for their hard work. His



[T]HE TROUBLE WITH ASPIRING TO A POST-RACIAL
PRESIDENCY IS THE PERSISTENCE OF THE REALITIES
OF RACISM, MATERIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL, SYMBOLIC
AND SUBSTANTIAL.

argument was that the campaign's insensitivities were resulting in it underperforming, being less effective than it could have been at mobilizing Black voters.

"We know how to do this in this area because we do it all the time, and we know who the people are," said Richard Chubb, a 72-year-old Black former principal who is a political activist and ally of Ware's. "People say they're going to vote, but you have to get them to the polls, and for that you need to know who they are."

Whether these tensions represented a shift in the power balance between a local Black leadership demanding a gatekeeper role and a national campaign that believes that role is no longer necessary was an open question.

Ware had a good relationship with the local campaign and had endorsed Obama early on. But, having sensed the weak links between the campaign and local Blacks, he, Mr. Chubb and others planned to run their own independent efforts to galvanize the Black community. "This is a historic moment," said Ware. "And I don't want to sit down on November 5 and have anybody say it was on me...We don't have time for no pity party." Given the impressive turnout of Black voters on polling day, it is impossible to know whether the Obama campaign had it covered all along or if Ware's efforts sealed the deal.

* * *

There are, I discovered, two Roanokes: Roanoke City and Roanoke County. The city of around 100,000 has a small market area, which is just this side of precious. Art galleries and a coffee shop, some bars, restaurants, museums, a diner, stores selling knick-knacks and stalls selling local produce. From there, the city spreads out in all directions, divided by Route 581 from north to south, the railroad tracks from east to west and by race and class throughout.

Crudely speaking, the Southeast is poor and white, the Southwest, affluent and white, the Northwest is Black and the Northeast is mixed.

The county climbs up to the Catawba Mountains to its Northwest and the Blue Ridge Mountains on its border to the south, or heads south through the valley past Valhalla vineyards. In either direction it's a staggering drive, trees pregnant with leaves, ready to give birth to a staggering autumn. Small roads snake up mountains, spawning even smaller roads that often lead to dead ends. Houses are set back into woodland; street names like Harborwood, Wildwood and Timberview leave little doubt about the historical preoccupations of the area.

The city, with a Black population of 25 percent, votes Democrat. In last year's city council elections, the Republicans didn't even bother putting up a candidate. In the last presidential election, the city of Roanoke went narrowly for Kerry 52-46, and in the Democratic primaries it went for Obama 57-42. The county is Republican, with a Black population of 6 percent. In 2004 the county heavily backed George Bush, 65-35, and Hillary Clinton won the county in the 2008 Democratic primary 55-45.

The Democrats simply could not win a state like Virginia, which is 20 percent Black, without winning cities like Roanoke to counter defeat in the rural white areas, and it could not win either the city or the state without taking the Black vote by a significant margin. In the event, Obama won Virginia 53-47. He took 92 percent of the Black vote and 39 percent of the white vote, enough to swing Virginia to the Democratic side for the first time in 44 years. He took Roanoke City 61-38 and lost Roanoke County by nearly the same margin, 60-39.

But the essential problem that Ware and others highlighted was rooted not simply in race but in



the dislocation between the rhetoric and reality of Obama's campaign. The campaign drew on the energy, commitment and engagement of huge numbers of volunteers, many of whom were worked every spare hour to get Obama elected. In that respect, the grassroots nature of his support was very real and central to the strength of his organization.

That has led some people to mistake the Obama campaign for a movement, when in fact it was nothing of the kind. It was a professionally run electoral machine in which orders came from the top down. Those who were involved had no real say in policy, strategy or direction. They did as they were asked, usually with great energy and enthusiasm. That is not a criticism, it is a description.

The question in Roanoke, and in towns and cities across the country, was how does a campaign that has arrived with orders from elsewhere gel and connect with the political structures and cultures that existed before it got there and will remain once it is gone? Where race in Roanoke is concerned, that was no straightforward task.

For a small Southern city with a sizeable Black community, the town got through the civil rights era pretty much unscathed. As most people, both Black and white, tell it, the city's Black elders had a meeting with the city's elected officials, and they decided to desegregate. And so the signs came down. There was no marching, sit-ins, hoses, demonstrations, heads cracked, jails filled or lives lost.

The benefits of this quiet transition are clear. The trauma of open confrontation that blighted so many southern towns during the 1950s and '60s was not a factor here. The transition from apartheid to normality was handled with a kind of businesslike determination that is rare for a conflict of that magnitude.

But there were other things that came with the struggles of the civil rights movement that Roanoke lacks. Just a two-hour drive away in Greensboro, North Carolina, a sit-in by four Black teenagers in Woolworth's galvanized an entire community and, indeed, a nation.

A few years ago, Franklin McCain, one of the youngsters involved, told me: "On the day that I sat at that counter I had the most tremendous feeling of

elation and celebration. I felt that in this life nothing else mattered. I felt like one of those wise men who sits cross-legged and cross-armed and has reached a natural high. Nothing else has ever come close. Not the birth of my first son nor my marriage... People go through their whole lives, and they don't get that to happen to them."

Black Roanoke never had that moment, a collective period of resistance, struggle and defiance. Consequently, white Roanoke was never truly confronted. The city's political class successfully negotiated so that Blacks could eat where they wanted. But that didn't mean they could afford everything on the menu.

According to the census, the median household income of a Black family in Roanoke is less than three quarters than of a white family; Black families are almost three times more likely than white families to earn less than \$20,000 a year and almost five times less likely to earn more than \$150,000. The city elders negotiated away confrontation, but they could not broker a just peace.

Nonetheless, Black Roanoke has had other moments. In addition to Ware's election to the Virginia House, the city had a Black mayor, Noel C. Taylor, for 17 years, from 1975 to 1992. "If you look at the number of Blacks we have elected to political office, for a town this size, it's very phenomenal," said Ware.

So, well before Obama, white people in Roanoke had shown that they are comfortable voting for Black politicians. And local Black leaders clearly know how to mobilize Black voters. But these electoral victories have not translated into broader political and economic gains. Absent a collective movement, the ability to keep individual Black leaders accountable and a white power structure responsive is lacking. The extent to which this may serve as a metaphor for the Obama presidency remains to be seen. One should not make too many claims from a brief experience in one small city in a new swing state. But neither should one ignore the dynamics of Roanoke.

Either way, the trouble with aspiring to a post-racial presidency is the persistence of the realities of racism, material and ideological, symbolic and substantial.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Swinging Virginia in Roanoke | By Gary Younge

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What lessons did Onzlee Ware have to share about winning elections in a majority-white district?
2. Why would Blacks feel that an all-inclusive, race-neutral campaign strategy did not speak to them?
3. According to Younge, what was the Obama campaign's "race problem" with the Black community in Roanoke?
4. What was it about the political campaign structure that discouraged that participation of Blacks?
5. Younge says that the way Roanoke handled the dismantling of legal segregation continues to impact how the city deals with race relations and change. How do you think something that happened so many years ago could continue to affect politics?
6. Younge describes a city that is divided by railroad tracks and highways into neighborhoods that are divided by race and class. Are there similar divisions in your city or town? How did they come about?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Voting patterns in Virginia presidential elections 1964-2008
2. Obama campaign strategy in Virginia
3. Civil rights movement in Virginia and desegregation of Roanoke

Take Back the Vote

By Sushma Sheth

INTRODUCTION

Joe the Plumber may have become the poster child for the critical white working-class vote in the 2008 presidential election cycle, but careful analyses of states like Florida show that urban Black and Latino voters were the decisive demographic of the 2008 elections.

National civic participation organizations, political parties and the Obama campaign drove voter turnout through large-scale operations, high-priced technology and large budgets. This article focuses on the strategy and electoral work of the Miami Workers Center (MWC), illustrating the value of community-based organizations mobilizing urban voters of color.

Streets across the nation filled at midnight on November 8, celebrating the victory of Barack Obama. From small towns to large urban centers, people were overcome with disbelief and excitement over his remarkable win.

In addition to the election of the first Black to the presidency, there were other surprises on Election Day: Florida became a blue state for only the third time since 1968. How did this happen? Was it the strategic targeting of white working-class voters? Was it the young folks who chose to break with tradition and support a candidate of color? Was it an about-face by conservative sections of central and north Florida?

FLORIDA'S WHITE VOTE

It was none of the above. White voters in Florida traditionally vote Republican; the Republican share of their votes in 2008 was almost exactly the same as it was in 2004. In 2004, 57% of white Floridians voted for George Bush. In 2008, 56% of white Floridians voted for John McCain.¹ The Democrats do not owe their Florida win to white voters.

Pundits and political strategists believe that young

whites were the game-changers for the election. Exit polling reveals a much more startling picture: a majority of young whites voted Republican in 2008 at rates slightly higher than they had voted for George Bush. Young whites did not spark the Democratic shift in Florida; in fact, they moved further Republican.

White women were a key constituency for this election, especially in Florida. Hillary Clinton claimed victory in the Florida primary and fought to include the delegate count in the nomination process for the Democratic ticket. Once Obama won the nomination, Hillary Clinton and Bill Clinton lobbied Florida women to endorse and support Obama for president.

White women were unmoved. Fifty-seven percent of white women voted for George Bush in 2004, exactly the same proportion of white women that voted for John McCain in 2008.²

FLORIDA'S SWING VOTERS

So where did the momentous shift come from? A regional analysis of voters across Florida demonstrates that North Florida remained overwhelmingly Republican. Central Florida, which includes Orlando and Tampa, voted Republican, but by a smaller margin. And southeastern Florida—home to Miami, Ft. Lauderdale and New England snowbirds—went strongly Democratic.

Florida's urban core turned the state blue. The heavily Latino counties of central Florida, including Tampa and Orlando, voted Republican, but by a small margin of 11,000 voters. This is partially

1. Bendixon & Associates, "The Florida 2008 Presidential Election: A Statistical Analysis," December 15, 2008.

2. Ibid.



because Democratic voters in the region increased by over 377,000 votes. Analyzing these votes by race, over 75 percent of this differential consisted of Latino voters. In other words, Latino voters in central Florida contributed considerably to the region's shift from red to blue. Similarly, south Florida—home to Miami and Ft. Lauderdale and the state's highest concentration of Black and Latino voters—voted blue by an overwhelming margin of 531,000 votes.

The 2008 election was not only a victory for Obama, it was also a victory for urban Black and Latino voters. In a dramatic shift from the disenfranchisement spree of the 2000 election, Black and Latino votes were counted and became the key factor in Florida's election results.

The 2008 election turnout is a testament to the thousands of activists, canvassers, organizers, community leaders, churches and civil rights institutions that have championed voting rights and amplified the political power of people of color.

But how did we get here? What strategies, tactics and tools have individuals and organizations used to build the Black and Latino electorate? Many sectors and players contributed to the Florida turnaround. Here we will focus on the most recent voter engagement campaigns of the Miami Workers Center.

MIAMI WORKERS CENTER—A REGIONAL MODEL FOR BLACK AND LATINO COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

The Miami Workers Center is a strategy and action center working for racial and economic justice in Miami and beyond. MWC initiates and supports grassroots organizations that confront the critical social issues of our time: poverty, racism, gender oppression and environmental destruction. Through community organizing, strategic communication and alliance building, MWC seeks to build a Miami where all residents have a democratic right to the city.

MWC began its organizing efforts in Liberty City, a low-income Black community. MWC was not founded by Blacks and did not grow directly out of the Black movement. However, MWC believed the community's material conditions, political history and non-alignment with the Cuban establishment best positioned it to lead a struggle for racial justice against Miami's political elite. Moreover, MWC believes that the inclusion and leadership of Blacks is critical to building a multiracial, multinational progressive movement, and the organization. The organization

has allied with faith-based and social service organizations, ethnic media and small businesses to win several concrete victories, including \$20 million in private housing subsidies, the preservation of 1600 affordable homes, and the establishment of a community-based Black history site.

RACE AND CLASS IN MIAMI: A SNAPSHOT

Race, class and political divisions in Miami have been produced by distinctive patterns of racial, national, class and political immigration and emigration in South Florida, as well as U.S. geo-political interests. A look at Miami's major demographic constituencies highlights particular socio-economic and political realities. Consider the following:

Blacks and Bahamians: Black migration was predominantly from Georgia, Alabama and the Bahamas in the post-slavery period. Exploited and segregated Black labor has been instrumental in building Miami's wealth based in agriculture, the building of railroads to the North and the early tourism industry. Today, Blacks make up 20% of the total county population, but much of that population is now a result of new immigration from the Caribbean.

Cubans: While there is a range of ideology and socioeconomic status within the Cuban community, Miami-Dade County is controlled by wealthy Cubans of the ideological right, united principally on the basis of a commitment to an aggressively hostile foreign policy toward Cuba. The Cuban exile elite are power players in Miami as a result of both their class background and preferential treatment by the U.S. government. Sixty percent of the people in the county identify as white Hispanics, with half of that total being Cuban.

Cuba has been the lens for both international and local politics and policies. Friends of the Castro government are often painted as enemies of the Miami power players in local media. This foreign policy lens extends both to race relations and domestic political affiliation. Since many Black liberation leaders like Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela were friendly toward Castro's Cuba, they were portrayed as enemies to the Cuban exile community. Similarly, because U.S. Republicans took a more aggressive position against Cuba, they became friends of the exile community.



Haitians: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 95,669 Haitians in Miami-Dade in 2000. Haitians make up 4.2 percent of the county's population, making them the second largest immigrant group, behind Cubans, in the county. There are more Haitians in Miami-Dade than there are Nicaraguans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans or Colombians. Haitians face the triple threat of being Black, poor and from Haiti. Therefore, while their numbers are relatively small, the combination of race, poverty and politics in Haiti make them highly visible, especially in juxtaposition with the Cubans.

Whites: Whites migrated out of Miami as Cubans, Haitians and others migrated into the city. In 1960, Miami was 90 percent non-Hispanic white; by 1990, the city was only about 10 percent non-Hispanic white, and the county 13.67 percent. The few whites that remain have largely acquiesced to Cuban political power, while a white elite still enjoys economic power and property ownership within the city.

A STRATEGY FOR PROGRESSIVE CHANGE IN MIAMI

Miami's right-wing Cuban political class has both exercised hegemony and been met with resistance. The Cuban right-wing perspective has been established through economic and political power, including voting power, media control, street mobilizations, intimidation and sometimes violence. The exile community has established a safe haven and platform for right-wing movements throughout Latin America. Other Latinos, 23 percent of the total Miami population, have been forced to go along with exile politics. Blacks have been even more stymied, with Blacks feeling they have been "leapfrogged", jumped over, by Cubans in terms of economic status. Haitians are further disadvantaged by having to bear a completely separate and unfavorable immigration policy than that enjoyed by Cubans.

The right-wing Cuban stronghold is loosening its grip on Miami. Generational shifts in attitudes and distance from the Cuban Revolution are resulting in more diversified opinions amongst Cubans toward Cuba policy, and toward local politics.

These realities present serious challenges to building a long-term progressive movement rooted in Miami's low-income communities of color. Despite resentment toward Cuban power, and internal fissures in the Cuban community, a significant portion of the Latino community, comprising the majority of the working class in the county and city, is conservative and less open to organizing around progressive issues. Thus, a large-scale progressive Latino organization that represents the interests of the Latino working class is not likely. Given this, MWC seeks to piece together a strategic progressive multi-racial working class block that may be majority Black, but will include progressive Latinos, and can function as a minority force in Miami's more conservative leaning politics.

MWC builds alliances between this progressive block and multi-class ethnic community organizations, as well as with broader progressive, liberal and center formations, such as the labor and environmental sectors. These alliances together can form a united front and build power to challenge the hegemonic control of the Cuban conservative elite.

The third element of MWC's strategy assumes that other progressive organizations will continue to work within Miami's Latino community. Right-leaning hardliners will likely age out while other members of Miami's social justice movement will organize new generations of Cubans and other Latinos around voting and labor rights and reveal progressive elements in Miami.

TAKE BACK THE VOTE: BUILDING BLACK AND LATINO CITIZENSHIP

MWC, together with grassroots projects Miami en Accion (MIA) and Low-Income Families Fighting Together (LIFFT) and other MWC allies, mobilized urban Black and Latino voters for the 2008 elections through the "Take Back the Vote" program. The program studied voting patterns in low-income Black and Latino communities, mapped precincts, identified new and occasional voters, and walked voting precincts encouraging residents to participate and use their voter power. Local residents and canvassers monitored the closing of polls and watched the results on television, late into the night.

Miami Workers Center's Take Back the Vote (TBV) campaign began in September 2002 as a



response to the mass disenfranchisement of thousands of voters during the 2000 presidential election. The campaign succeeded in bringing the first international election observers to U.S. soil, including observers from South Africa, Mexico and Brazil. TBV called for organizations and individuals in poor and disenfranchised communities to actively monitor and defend the right to vote through grassroots training, participation and action. The program also worked to protect the vote through dispatching “election defense teams” to 70 precincts in Black and Haitian neighborhoods.

In 2008, the Take Back the Vote campaign mobilized Latinos and Blacks to the polls. The campaign registered 3,000 new voters in alliance with *Democracia USA*, a national nonpartisan Hispanic civic engagement organization. TBV not only registered voters, it also served to build long-term progressive Black and Latino community power. The voter mobilization project held street festivals, engaged hundreds of community volunteers and paid canvassers to mobilize 4,000 voters and recruit members to MWC’s grassroots organizations. MWC is still fighting for housing and jobs for working class people of color by building collective power grassroots leadership. Increasingly, though, MWC is committed to blending electoral work with community organizing.

Unlike traditional voter registration work, MWC canvassers engaged potential voters with a series of questions (related to our ongoing campaigns) focusing on issues such as the recent financial bailouts, racism and gay marriage. Canvassers, who were recruited from the targeted communities, participated in political education sessions every week and gained a deeper understanding of the importance of mobilizing Black and Latino citizens to vote. This organizing model provides both political education around voting rights and awareness in communities that are reluctant to participate in electoral politics because they have been consistently disenfranchised.

ORGANIZING AND THE VOTE

As a community organizing institution, Miami Workers Center entered voter work after record-low civic participation amongst our base. In 2006, a local Miami commissioner ran for re-election. With only 16.7 percent voter turnout, he won by a mere 2,048

votes. Funded by luxury housing developers, he won by a 10 to 1 margin against the challenger. Through a basic voter turnout program, organizations like the Miami Workers Center have the capacity to impact elections and increase democratic participation in U.S. urban centers.

MWC uses the approach of Integrated Voter Engagement, linking electoral work with organizing strategies aimed at ongoing issues of critical concern to the community. This approach is grounded in an effort to integrate voter registration, education, mobilization and protection into the toolkit for building a broad movement for racial and economic justice. Election time becomes a fertile time to educate local residents about the public policy reforms community organizers campaign for year-round, such as stopping displacement, forcing developers to provide community benefits, pushing government to enforce rules around job creation, encouraging contracting with businesses led by people of color and stopping police brutality.

Election cycles also become an opportunity to shift the debate to publicize campaign issues. For example, MWC injected the pressing issue of gentrification into the 2005 Miami-Dade City Commission elections through a robust organizing and communications program. The efforts of MWC’s Regional Equity for Neighborhoods and Tenants (RENT) campaign forced election candidates to acknowledge the effects of gentrification on low-income residents and take positions on controversial development projects impacting quality of life in the city.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

The 2008 presidential campaign brought race and the politics of racial solidarity to the forefront of the nation’s dialogue. The Black and Latino votes were more important than they have been in the past, elevating the power of a united voice of people of color. Young people of color led record turnout at the polls this year. However, we know from history that political momentum will not be maintained after an election unless there is a movement to support it. We know that promises from the lips of politicians vanish into air when the election cycle is over. We must maintain pressure on politicians beyond the voting booth; this is why we organize.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Take Back the Vote | By Sushma Sheth

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Sheth states that urban Black and Latino voters were “the decisive demographic of the 2008 elections.” What evidence does she present to support this claim?
2. How did white voters in Florida respond to the choice between Obama and McCain?
3. What tactics did the Miami Workers Center use to connect with the Black community?
4. Why did Miami Workers Center decide to work on electoral campaigns? How does this work relate to their ongoing organizing?
5. How did Take Back the Vote engage with potential voters in the 2008 elections? Could these tactics be used in other communities? What can be done to maintain pressure on politicians once elections have taken place and they are in office?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Obama won Florida in 2008. In which other elections since 1968 did Florida vote Democratic?
2. How are immigration policies different for Cubans vs. Haitians? Why do these differences exist?
3. Changing political attitudes among Miami’s Cubans and moderate or progressive groups within the Cuban community
4. Ongoing work of Miami Workers Center



Obama and the New Geographies of Black Politics

by Makani Themba-Nixon

Say it loud! He's Black and I'm proud!

—Sung by a group of janitors at an impromptu Election Night street gathering in Washington, DC

Obama's election on November 4, 2008 was the climax of two years of pulling together, working and praying in many African-American communities. Folk partied like it was South Africa 1994. My mother-in-law called crying, thanking God she had lived to see this day. Every major urban center was full of smiling, crying Black people so full of joy and, yes, hope, that they would spontaneously talk to you, bursting with analysis. *He whipped that fool like he stole something. Obama, baby!*

The celebration cut across class and nationality. New African immigrants joined forces with Blacks whose U.S. roots extend back centuries. In most major cities with significant African immigrant populations, African-born cab drivers volunteered by the hundreds to support the campaign by getting people to the polls and making regular financial contributions. Ethiopians danced in the streets with regular B-boys and b-girls in DC. Obama's Kenyan blood and Black lived experience gave people throughout the African diaspora a sense of being connected to this victory. From the offices of the National Council of Negro Women to Nairobi's streets, people cried and danced and hugged each other and even did the electric slide to freedom.

There were a million stories of Black people voting against all odds. The 84-year-old man with a more than 50-year-old felony record who never knew, until this year, that he could get his record expunged and

vote. The family from Culpepper, Virginia—including a 62-year-old grandmother and three grandchildren in their twenties—all voting together for the first time. There are so many stories, each its own miracle and testament to an inherently racist electoral system that is more like an obstacle course than a franchise. Yet, my people did all they could to make sure they would be counted.

In places like Hampton Roads, Virginia, they stood in line for more than seven hours—more proof that the electoral system did not expect them to show up. Even with the Obama campaign's promotion of early voting and the smart strategy of holding rallies near early voting facilities so attendees could go vote right after the event, there was still an unprecedented turnout of Black people on Election Day, especially in the South. Anticipated high Black turnout forced McCain to spend money in states that have historically been Republican strongholds.

There was, finally, some funded infrastructure for voter protection to make sure Black votes were counted. Long-time warriors like the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, NAACP and the Advancement Project were joined, for the first time, by the Obama campaign, which organized voter protection teams in every state where funny business was expected. It was another historic first: a Democratic candidate who refused to participate in the long-time "gentlemen's agreement"

between the parties to look the other way on voter suppression, an agreement that has kept Republicans in the Electoral College driver's seat until today.

There is no denying that the atmosphere has changed in Black communities. The pride is contagious, and communities are feeling pretty good about themselves for the first time in a while. Millions of people made the trek to stand in the freezing DC cold to witness the first Black president's inauguration. Obama "bling"—jewelry, studded t-shirts and paraphernalia—is everywhere. There is a new sense of community in neighborhoods nationwide as Black people who turned out to vote continue to turn out for the volunteer engagement meetings that the Administration has dubbed "Obama for America 2.0."

BLACK ORGANIZING: BACK FROM THE DEAD?

It is not even three years ago that Black organizing was declared dead by some, and funded efforts to build progressive electoral power went to extremes to avoid investing in Black communities. Immigration reform was the "new" civil rights struggle, and luminaries like Van Jones were writing eulogies for the Black movement. His widely circulated piece, "Shout VIVA Anyhow," published in May 2006 on HuffingtonPost.com was exemplary of the dominant sentiment at the time:

Deep inside, I was grieving for my own people. I wished that my beloved African-American community had managed - somehow - to retain our own sparkling sense of faith in a magnificent future. There was once a time when we, too, marched forward together - filled with utter confidence in the new day dawning. There was a time when we, too, believed that America's tomorrow held something bright for us ... and for our children.

But those dreams have been eaten away by the AIDS virus, laid off by down-sizers, locked out by smiling bigots, felled by assassins, shot up by gang-bangers and buried in a corporate-run prison yard. When Katrina's floodwaters washed our problems back onto the front pages, the once-mighty Black Freedom Movement could not rise even to THAT occasion. Our legendary "Movement" has collapsed - with our "spokespersons," both young and old, trying somehow to live off our past glories.

Meanwhile, the white-shirted future was pouring itself down Market Street - chanting "¡Si, Se Puede!"

Well, to quote that inimitable philosopher Koolhaas Haacke, "How ya like me now?"

In spite of widespread protestations to the contrary, Black leadership, money and organizing made a real difference this election. The Obama campaign provided a smart framework and an historic opportunity that engaged Black people not as parents or as neighbors fighting to shut down a local incinerator, but *as Black people* and *at scale*. In places like Virginia, Ohio and California, the campaign made good use of existing Black organizations and seasoned Black veterans as a foundation for jumpstarting organizing during the primaries. These networks also played leadership roles in Get Out the Vote efforts—as well as poll monitoring and legal observation—during the national election. In states like South Carolina, an infusion of "imported" young organizers joined forces with veterans like Greenwood, South Carolina City Councilwoman Edith Childs, best known for introducing the President to her signature chant, "Fired up! Ready to go!" It was a combination of these and other factors that created expanded organizing infrastructure for new folk to engage.

Obama is the first nominee of a major party to implement a full-blown street operation targeting Black voters. The South Carolina primary was the first of many victories where this strategy paid off big-time. It was a watershed moment in American politics: a candidate took his case directly to Black people and, in doing so, bucked a century-old tradition of paying "leaders" to "deliver" us.

By contrast, the Hillary Clinton campaign paid out big money to the traditional pantheon of gatekeepers. South Carolina State Senator Rev. Darrell Jackson was a classic case in point. Clinton reportedly paid Jackson's public relations firm \$10,000 a month to gain inroads into South Carolina's Black communities. When all was said and done, Jackson could not even deliver his own mega-church to Clinton. And he was not alone. Any prominent Blacks on the wrong side of the Obama train were nothing less than dissed and exposed. Even the venerated Tavis Smiley was not immune. Smiley's critical remarks about Obama not showing up for his annual State of the Black Union gathering received such negative feedback that he quit his regular spot on *The Tom Joyner Morning Show*, a popular syndicated Black radio program.



Obama's election is, in fact, the latest milestone in what can only be understood as a significant generational change in Black national leadership. Between the White House, the NAACP and the Black Leadership Forum, to name just a few key institutions, these new leaders are moving away from much of the politics—though not the important principles—of the civil rights leadership and embracing more technical approaches to addressing the challenges at hand. The promise is better-run, more politically savvy institutions. But what will their impact be on Black power over the long term?

The truth is that having the Obamas in the White House will not necessarily mean more Black power. His Election Night speech foreshadowed what was to come: the entire rainbow of constituents was named, gay and straight, young and old. Blacks were never mentioned. And Obama's cabinet appointments make clear that there will be few progressives with high-level access.

So, what will become of the millions of Blacks newly activated by the election? The Black institutions, even with their smart, savvy leadership, do not yet have the capacity to effectively engage communities at this scale. And there is simply not enough intentional, progressive institution-building in Black communities, especially at the local level, to hold this work.

There are lots of explanations for this lack of infrastructure. Most of them place the blame on Black failings. According to this narrative, the problem is that—whether due to a social beat down or lack of leaders—we Black people lost our moral compass, our vision and our capacity to organize and be organized. Of course, the truth is always more complicated.

The late 1960s and early 1970s provided a unique context for African-American organizing. Overt racism in the form of Jim Crow segregation, the violent attacks against African-American leaders and activists by government entities, along with many other factors, served to catalyze a multigenerational, community-based response. Federal supports via community action programs and Head Start, faith-based funding and grassroots support helped create a base of activists who were able to survive economically as full-time organizers and activists. The expanding economy and a higher corporate tax rate created a larger pool of public funding for direct services, including targeted

programs that significantly expanded the number of African-American college students and professionals.

However, by 1981, the number of African-American institutions engaged in organizing had dwindled significantly. Reduced public funding and nonprofit incorporation requirements began to restrict political activity. Foundations and individual donors became the primary sources of financial support for progressive advocacy. Monies previously invested in African-American organizing were largely redirected toward efforts to build broad-based coalitions to combat Reagan-era funding cuts, without a strategy for expanding grassroots organizing in the most affected communities. The exodus of African-American organizing talent to institutions with the capacity to support them and their work exacerbated the devastation of Black organizing infrastructure.

Of course, there are some stellar exceptions. Some institutions, like Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, maintain their base and organizing culture by engaging Black youth and college students with the means to work for limited resources. And some groups have been able to effectively institutionalize in spite of these challenges. However, in many communities, Black organizing infrastructure is underfinanced and even under attack. There are few intermediary or technical assistance institutions that can support these groups or their work because few of these intermediary and support institutions have any long-term commitment to building Black leadership, much less power. Often, the focus on Blacks is on gaining their solidarity to support “hot” issues like immigration reform, the impetus behind many of the “Black-Brown alliance-building” efforts.

Yet, as the 2008 election season has shown, investing in expanding Black political power can make a real difference in expanding progressive political power overall. Given many Blacks' strong and unprecedented sense of investment in the Obama administration, there is an even greater need to invest in independent, Black *progressive* infrastructure with the capacity to be publicly critical and to be heard. Progressive organizers and changemakers face new challenges in a radically altered political environment: building organic civic infrastructure, including a powerful Black organizing core, that can navigate these new realities and engage our diverse communities beyond showing up to the polls.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Obama and the New Geographies of Black America

By Makani Themba-Nixon

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Barack Obama's presidential campaign never promoted an explicit racial justice agenda or made public appeals to the African-American community, but Themba asserts that "Black leadership, money and organizing" were key elements in securing Obama's victory. How do you explain this apparent paradox?
2. Do you agree with the author's assertion that Obama's election represents a "generational" shift in Black leadership?
3. The Obama campaign actively opposed voter suppression schemes. Why was this such an important focus of the campaign?
4. Will having Obama in the White House translate into more "Black power" for Blacks? How?
5. How does Themba explain the retreat from organizing and institution-building in African-American communities? Do you agree with her assessment?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. African immigrant participation in the Obama campaign
2. The relationship of civil rights organizations to the Obama campaign
3. Funding patterns by national foundations for organizing in Black communities

Race and the Right

By Chip Berlet

Just before he was pummeled to the ground and beaten on election night 2008, his attackers shouted “Obama,” said Ali Kamara. The Black teenager—a Muslim immigrant from Liberia—told reporters, “I see the car coming...They were not happy. They had hoodies on. They started hitting me with bats, and my body started vibrating. I was bleeding all over.” Kamara, who lives on Staten Island, New York, said, “I did not know them...I think it was a racist crime.”

A few hours later, a church in Springfield, Massachusetts serving a predominantly Black congregation was burned to the ground in an arson attack believed to be a hate crime. Crosses were burned in the yards of Obama supporters in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Black figures hanging from nooses tied to trees were discovered in Maine.

Across the country, hundreds of similar incidents—far above the normal rate—have been recorded by the Southern Poverty Law Center, according to spokesperson Mark Potok.

The election of Barack Obama has poked the racist beehive, and we can expect some buzzing around in the months ahead. Rightists ranging from neo-Nazis to mainstream conservatives are eager to reframe issues in ways that invoke racialized fears among some white voters. Affirmative action, poverty, education, language, taxation, health care, immigration, terrorism and national security have all been racially framed in the past; all have the same potential in the current political environment.

ORGANIZED WHITE SUPREMACISTS

At the farthest end of the spectrum, the neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement saw opportunity in Obama’s victory. In an essay titled “Obama Is Good for Our Movement,” the group predicted that “President-Elect Obama is going to be the spark that arouses the ‘white movement.’”

It went on: “For far too long, sixty years or so, our race has been doing nothing but losing ground. Our elected leaders have sold our race out time and time again. They have made concessions to the ‘minorities’

of this nation. Those minorities are rapidly becoming the Majority! This is our fault. We need to lead our race to the forefront and get back what is ours. We need to keep our race alive and pure. Working together we can get things done! Obama’s win is our win. We should all be happy of this event.”

Some white supremacist groups pursue a strategy of masking their overt racism in order to lure recruits while featuring essays on strengthening ethnic identity for white people. The website Stormfront.org has practiced this technique for years. Stormfront describes itself as a “White Nationalist Community,” promoting “White Pride World Wide.” Dig a little deeper into this website, which claims it is not racist, and you discover the song lyrics for “A Warrior Does Not Return, Without Blood On His Axe,” posted after the election of Obama. It laments:

“The arrival of lower races has begun...Hear my call for Aryanism...Archetypes of Teutonic grandeur DNA & RNA...You my enemy, of pure cold hatred! Bring out your worst psycho gimp! I’m going to smatter his face into pulp! With my sharp frenzy battle axe!”

When Democrats are in power and Republicans seem weak, it can kindle acts of terrorism and assault by the most zealous racists intent on mobilizing potential recruits to step outside the electoral process.

CLOSET WHITE NATIONALISTS

Then there are closet white nationalists like Pat Buchanan and Lou Dobbs who have better tailors and greater access to major corporate media than the



white-hood-and-brown-shirt crowd. Expect to hear the nativists and xenophobes ramp up their bashing of immigrants, Mexicans, Muslims, Arabs and the entire country of China.

Watching the rise of Obama, Pat Buchanan lamented the incompetence of the Republicans, saying that “[w]hile Barack was locking up black America, McCain failed to hold onto Bush’s share of the white working class.” Buchanan also faulted McCain for not taking a strong stand against abortion and gay rights, and condemned the “mainstream media” and “Beltway Republicans” for keeping McCain from being “out front on these moral and cultural issues.”

In reacting to the election of Obama, once again Buchanan spoke to multiple constituencies by using coded language. Buchanan writes of “social insecurity...traceable to mass immigration, legal and illegal, which has brought in scores of millions who are altering the character of communities [creating the] perception that we are losing the America that we grew up in.” This can be interpreted as simply an ode to times past or a polemic longing for the time when whites ruled America and people of color knew their proper place.

Stripped of its artifice, Buchanan was noting that the color of America was changing to a darker hue, especially through a swarm of swarthy Mexicans allegedly stealing “our” jobs and changing “our” culture. In an essay anticipating an Obama victory, Buchanan made predictions that horrified his rightwing audience:

“Affirmative action—hiring and promotions based on race, sex and sexual orientation until specified quotas are reached—will be rigorously enforced throughout the U.S. government and private sector.”

“Universal health insurance will be enacted, covering legal and illegal immigrants, providing another powerful magnet for the world to come to America, if necessary by breaching her borders.”

Obama directly challenged the anti-immigrant vitriol of the White Nationalist commentators. During the campaign, he observed that some pundits had “basically been feeding a kind of xenophobia. There’s a reason why hate crimes against Hispanic people doubled last year...If you have people like Lou Dobbs and Rush Limbaugh ginning things up, it’s not surprising that would happen.”

Racism and xenophobia often fly in formation with anti-Semitism and red-baiting. The blogsite Free

Republic, a favorite nest of the xenophobic and nativist anti-immigrant movement, was rife with claims that Jews and communists based in Chicago’s Hyde Park neighborhood connived to arrange for the presidential candidacy of fellow resident and “radical” Black activist Barack Obama. “Obama’s Cuddly Old, Terrorist Friendly, Socialist Rabbi, Friend and Neighbour—Arnold Wolf?” was the headline for a cross-post from New Zealand blogger Trevor Loudon that appeared a few days before the election. “Considering some of B Hussein Obama’s other friends—e.g. Farrakan (sic) and Wright—this rabbi must be self-destructive, suicidal, or willfully naïve,” responded Rummyfan. “Is there ANYONE that Barack Obama knows/associates with/allies himself with that is NOT a socialist/Marxist/Communist radical?” asked FarRightFanatic.

CULTURAL CONSERVATIVES

Less toxic but perhaps as dangerous in the long term and more prevalent at the moment is the notion of “post-racism” advanced by cultural conservatives. During the next few years, progressives will likely face a direct assault on all government programs described as supporting racial “privilege” or “special rights” for people of color, immigrants and women. Calls for abandoning affirmative action and other government programs addressing racial disparities came quickly after the election, as did suggestions that Obama be bipartisan and not move too fast.

Some conservatives have wasted little time in blaming the economic meltdown on people of color and the impoverished.

In the *National Review* online, Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies speculated that the financial collapse of Washington Mutual resulted from affirmative action employment programs that promoted multiculturalism and diversity. Krikorian observed that WaMu was “recognized as a top employer by *Hispanic Business* magazine and the Human Rights Campaign” shortly before failing, and he mused that this might be “Cause and Effect.”

Over at Fox News, business anchor Neil Cavuto criticized a California Democratic Congressman, saying: “I don’t remember a clarion call that said, ‘Fannie and Freddie are a disaster. Lending to minorities and risky folks is a disaster.’” Cavuto conveniently ignored data proving that most subprime lenders with ethical practices are thriving and have lower default rates in these same communities than many commercial banks. Even though most progressives will dismiss these claims as empty racist rhetoric, the broad

scapegoating of people of color is going to increase during the hard economic times that Obama faces.

“Do Americans really buy this kind of nonsense?” asks J. Richard Cohen, president of Southern Poverty Law Center. Are we “supposed to believe that impoverished Blacks and Latinos across our country brought down the titans of Wall Street with their wild-eyed dreams of owning their own homes, taking out mortgages they couldn’t afford? We’re supposed to believe that’s why stock markets are plummeting and the global banking system is collapsing like a house of cards?” According to Cohen, many people unfortunately *do* believe these racist raps, “especially when they hear the lie repeated over and over again by politicians and supposedly mainstream pundits like Fox News’s Neil Cavuto.” Cohen warns that the current conditions are “relished by those who thrive by stoking fear and division in America, from the cross-burning Klansmen to the loudmouths of right-wing talk radio to the suit-wearing academics who cloak their bigotry in pseudo-scientific research.”

REPUBLICAN PARTY

The intensity of the racist backlash may depend on the direction the Republican Party takes. Regional differences are significant when analyzing white Republican voters. Of 16 states where 60 percent or more white voters picked McCain, almost two-thirds—ten states—were in the secessionist Confederacy. These are also states with a large number of fundamentalist Christians, raising the issue of whether it is race or religion or both that guides the voting patterns here.

Pollsters noted that Obama did better with white Protestants than Kerry. But Kerry was a poor candidate, and Obama was an extraordinarily skilled one. Comparing Obama with 2000 Democratic candidate Al Gore reveals that both Gore and Obama picked up 34 percent of the white Protestant vote. In 2000, however, Gore attracted an estimated 30 percent of the white evangelical vote, while Obama garnered only 25 percent in 2008.

There is no way to precisely predict the future of race in the Republican Party because there are so many competing forces and factions prodding the giant elephant toppled over on the living room floor. Christian nationalists, white nationalists, Rockefeller Republicans and economic libertarians are all looking for coalition partners to grab power. Various factions of the political right are engaged in a battle to resuscitate the elephant and drape it with their racing colors. It cannot be a good sign that one candidate for Republican Party chairman circulated a CD containing the song “Barack

the Magic Negro,” while the *New York Post* ran a cartoon depicting Obama as a dead rabid chimpanzee.

How the Republicans reconstitute themselves will affect how racism plays out. If a coalition of Rockefeller Republicans and economic libertarians can’t expel or at least displace the Christian nationalists, the Republican Party will continue to move to the right. A post-election survey by the Pew Research Center found that “roughly two-thirds (68 percent) of Republican and Republican-leaning voters identify themselves as conservative, and three-quarters of these voters think the party should turn further to the right.” A strong rightward shift might prompt an exodus of centrist Republicans and create the space for a centrist third party or a base of support for politicians running as Independents. A core group of southern white Christian voters could emerge in control, and then struggle over race as an issue. However, the selection of Michael Steele (a favorite of the Christian Right) as the first Black Republican Party chairman indicates that some substantial portion of the party recognizes that it must, at the least, give the appearance of being something other than an all-white preserve.

MORE WORK AHEAD

A few days after the 2008 election, more than 900 people gathered in Oakland, California to attend the “Facing Race” conference sponsored by the Applied Research Center. Rinku Sen, the group’s executive director and publisher of *ColorLines* magazine, said “working to achieve racial justice is the key to building the society in which we as progressive activists want to live. That’s at the center of the work in front of us. The election of Barack Obama was one important step forward, but now we all need to keep stirring so we can go the rest of the way. According to Sen, this will involve “reframing the messages” in a way that focuses on “structural racism and systemic inequality rather than simply personal prejudice.”

Jeff Chang, who covered the campaign for *Vibe* magazine, agreed, saying, “Obama was able to draw on the metaphors and tropes of the racial justice movement,” but it wasn’t the centerpiece of his campaign. Chang said we need to “make racial justice explicit, talk about why it was at the core of his victory, and move forward.”

To do that, we must guard against a counterattack from the racially regressive right.

This is a revised version of an article from the Progressive magazine, and it appears here with the permission of the editor, Matthew Rothschild.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Berlet addresses the online presence and recruiting strategies of white supremacist groups. Do you think these groups have much influence on U.S. politics?
2. Berlet calls Pat Buchanan and Lou Dobbs “white nationalists.” What do think he means by this? Do you think Buchanan and Dobbs consider themselves to be white nationalists? What do you think the difference is between a white nationalist and a conservative?
3. Did the McCain campaign’s decision not to take a stronger stance against abortion and gay rights damage his campaign, as Buchanan believed? What role did the debate over “moral values” play in the 2008 election?
4. Obama identified a relationship between the anti-immigrant tirades in the media and hate crimes against immigrants. Do you believe such a relationship exists? Why? Why not?
5. Berlet sees a relationship between xenophobia and racism. How would you describe that relationship?
6. How have conservatives linked their views about race to their explanations of the causes of the economic recession?
7. How do you think the selection of Michael Steele as Republican Party chairman will impact the politics and overall perception of the party?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Other evidence that Obama’s election has “poked the racist beehive”
2. How the selection of Steele is working out for the Republicans
3. In what regions have hate crimes against Latinos increased? What have the local government and leaders in those regions done to combat these crimes?
4. Fox News coverage of immigration issues
5. Other issues being used to rally the right wing

Barack, Hillary and U.S. Feminism

By Meredith Tax

The Clinton-Obama contest for the Democratic nomination sparked more heated debate among feminists than at any time since the 1970s. In rage and bewilderment, mainstream feminists asked why all women did not rally behind Hillary Clinton, while left-wing feminists wondered where they ever got the idea that they could deliver our votes on the basis of gender alone.

The primary campaign thus exposed a long-standing faultline in the U.S. feminist movement and raised fundamental political questions. The faultline is not, as the media would have it, one of demographics—white vs. Black, old vs. young, college-educated vs. blue-collar. Though it has racial and generational aspects, this is basically a struggle over political strategy, the latest chapter in a hundred-year argument between liberal feminists, who see women's issues as separate and self-contained, and left-wing feminists, who see them as intertwined with race, class and other social questions.

THE CLINTON-OBAMA DEBATE

The debate was kicked off early in 2008 by three writers associated with the Women's Media Center (www.womensmediacenter.com)—Gloria Steinem, Carol Jenkins and Robin Morgan. Steinem created an enormous stir with a *New York Times* op-ed on January 8, 2008 in which she responded to Hillary's loss in Ohio by saying: "Gender is probably the most restricting force in American life...Black men were given the vote a half-century before women of any race were allowed to mark a ballot, and generally have ascended to positions of power, from the military to the boardroom, before any women."

Frances Kissling, ex-director of Catholics for a Free Choice, responded in *Salon*: "I do not want a femi-

nism that is part of the status quo, and so I do not want the first woman president to be a Clintonian." (January 10, 2008) Black feminist broadcast journalist Carol Jenkins riposted with a piece supporting the position that sexism trumps racism: "Gender bias cuts through race and class and age and geography with intent to undermine. And, if you're a woman of color—even more so."¹

The battle heated up as the New York primary approached. On February 2, the Women's Media Center published "Goodbye to All That 2," a cry of rage by board member Robin Morgan in which she accused young women who supported Obama of just wanting to please their boyfriends and went on: "How dare *anyone* unilaterally decide when to turn the page on history, papering over real inequities and suffering constituencies in the promise of a feel-good campaign?...*Goodbye to going gently into any goodnight any man prescribes for us.* We are the women who changed the reality of the United States. And though we never went away, *brace yourselves: we're back.*"²

The next day, a large group of left-wing feminist academics, activists and writers published a widely distributed "Petition for Peace and Barack Obama" that began, "In the coming elections, it is important to remember that war and peace are as much 'women's issues' as are health, the environment, and

1. Jenkins, Carol, "Invisible Woman," January 11, 2008, www.womensmediacenter.com.

2. Morgan, Robin, "Goodbye to All That 2, February 2, 2008" www.womensmediacenter.com/ex/020108.html.

the achievement of educational and occupational equality.”³ The petition went on to identify Clinton as a liberal hawk, based on her record in the Senate and her vote for the war in Iraq.

A few days later, Black law professor Kimberle Crenshaw and Eve Ensler, author of *The Vagina Monologues*, joined Hillary’s critics by pointing to “the double standard of stigmatizing Obama’s Black voters as racially motivated while whitewashing Clinton’s white voters as ‘simply voters’...At issue is a profound difference in seeing feminism as intersectional and global rather than essentialist and insular...For many of us, feminism is not separate from the struggle against violence, war, racism and economic injustice.”⁴

Then, a group of feminist academics, writers and activists published a petition supporting Hillary, which, after citing her “proven record,” denounced misogynist attacks on her in the media: “How many women have we known—truly gifted workers, professionals, and administrators—who have been criticized for their reserve and down-to-earth way of speaking? Whose commanding style, seriousness, and get-to-work style are criticized as ‘cold’ and insufficiently ‘likable’? These prejudices have been scandalously present in this campaign.”⁵

Though many Black feminists had yet to be heard, the struggle was heating up to the degree that a little breakfast was arranged to patch things up, according to a letter in *The Nation* written (anonymously) by Black columnist Patricia Williams. “Two days after the Texas debate between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, a group of old friends broke out the good china for a light breakfast of strong coffee, blueberry muffins and fresh-squeezed orange juice. We were there to hash out a split that threatened our friendship and the various movements with which we are affiliated.”⁶ The friends included Gloria Steinem, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Johnnetta Cole, Laura Flanders, Kimberle Crenshaw, Carol Jenkins, Eleanor Smeal, Mab Segrest, Achola Pala Okeyo, Janet Dewart Bell and Patricia Williams. A plea to unite against the Republicans followed.

But the differences were too real to be smoothed over, and Black feminists continued to speak up for Obama. In March, Alice Walker wrote a moving essay relating her support for his candidacy to the way she grew up as a sharecropper’s daughter in the segregated South.⁷ Linda Burnham, former director of the Women of Color Resource Center, weighed in on the idea that we live in a post-racial society:

*There is a brand of feminism, amply critiqued but still very much alive, that focuses on gender bias while consistently downplaying the salience of race... Those of us who witnessed the response to Hurricane Katrina; who check in occasionally on the racial demographics of the incarcerated; who are aware of the racial divide in income and, more significantly, wealth; who recognize that the public schools grow ever more segregated while the push-out rate for Black and Latino students rises ever higher; who track the relative scarcity of Blacks in professional schools, as well as in a whole range of professions; who know that the infant mortality rate for Black babies outstrips the rate for white babies by two to one; who watch the dynamics of gentrification, dislocation and homelessness—we are not convinced that racism is an insignificant remnant. And we’re hard pressed to understand why this argument should be any more tolerated when it comes from liberal feminists than when it comes from the more frankly racist right wing.*⁸

In the view of Clinton supporters like Linda Hirshman, this attitude is exactly the problem—left-wing feminists kept getting distracted by other issues instead of understanding that all women must unite in order to win. Writing in *The Washington Post*, Hirshman opined: “So what keeps the movement from realizing its demographic potential?...[F]aced with criticism that the movement was too white and middle-class, many influential feminist thinkers conceded that issues affecting mostly white middle-class women—such as the corporate glass ceiling or the high cost of day care—should not significantly concern the feminist movement. Particularly in academic circles, only issues that invoked the “intersectionality” of many overlapping oppressions were deemed worthy. Moreover,

5. “Feminists for Clinton,” Huffington Post, February 15, 2008.

6. *The Nation*, February 27, 2008.

7. Walker, Alice, “Lest We Forget,” www.theroot.com, March 27, 2008.

8. Burnham, Linda, “The Tightrope and the Needle,” www.portside.org, March 18, 2008.

9. Hirshman, Linda, “Looking to the Future, Feminism has to Focus,” *Washington Post*, June 8, 2008.



THERE IS A BRAND OF FEMINISM, AMPLY CRITIQUED
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that concern must include the whole weight of those oppressions. In other words, since racism hurts black women, feminists must fight not only racist misogyny but racism in any form; not only rape as an instrument of war, but war itself.”⁹

Burnham sees the problem differently: “For nearly forty years feminists have wrangled over how to integrate issues of race, class, sexual orientation and other markers of inequality into a coherent, powerful gender analysis. Women of color insist on the complex relationship between racism and sexism and the central significance of racism in the lives of people of color. White feminists nod their heads, ‘Yes, of course, we understand, we’re with you on that.’ Then comes the crunch, when the content of your feminism actually matters—as it does in this campaign—and they revert to the primacy of sexism over all other forms of discrimination and oppression. All the tendencies that got feminism tagged as a white, middle-class women’s thing are, brutally, back in play.”¹⁰

Though the rancor among feminists died down soon after Obama won the primary campaign, their differences were, fundamentally, a debate about basic strategic questions: What is a feminist issue? How should feminists organize? With whom should we seek alliances? Should we concentrate on big, symbolic victories or work for more tangible reforms? The struggle over these questions has a long history in the women’s movement.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE STRUGGLE WITH- IN THE U.S. FEMINIST MOVEMENT

In the heyday of the suffrage movement, mainstream

women’s organizations adopted a strategy of concentrating single-mindedly on winning women the right to vote and were willing to do whatever it took to get white male votes, including race and immigrant baiting. The left wing of the women’s movement—socialists, social feminists, sex radicals and Black women’s organizations—tried to link suffrage to economic and social issues, and reached out to the labor movement and to Black and immigrant male voters. World War I changed the game—when the organized left opposed U.S. entry into the war, it was pretty well wiped out by the state. Except for the small group of militants who later formed the National Women’s Party, mainstream feminists supported the war. They got the vote as a reward, but their narrow perspective and political compromises turned off the next generation to organized feminism.

A similar faultline ran through women’s movement politics in the late 1960s and 1970s. Left-wing feminists—who identified as women’s liberationists or radical feminists or socialist feminists or women of color—worked on a wide range of issues including the Vietnam war; abortion and reproductive rights; sexual freedom and gay rights; union struggles; and support for the Black and other national liberation movements. But though left-wing feminists were enormously important in the beginning of the movement and in its cultural and intellectual life, they never built national organizations with broad programs that were stable enough to last. Meanwhile, mainstream feminists built strong, tightly controlled national organizations that were ideologically on message, skilled at working the media and good at raising money.

10. Burnham, op cit



They pursued a strategy of doing everything through the Democratic Party and focused increasingly on the Equal Rights Amendment.

With the Reagan era, conservatives launched a broad mobilization against women's liberation, affirmative action, gay rights and other democratic advances of the 1960s and 1970s. They fought the ERA in electoral and propaganda campaigns; organized a Right to Life movement against abortion; mobilized bigotry and fundamentalism against gay rights; did extensive union-busting; and undercut free expression with censorship campaigns that were thinly disguised attacks on increased sexual freedom for women and gays. Under this right-wing assault, the alliance that was the women's movement disintegrated; what remained were reproductive rights organizations and the mainstream groups based in Washington DC. As these were forced more and more into a defensive posture, their ideas and methods of work became increasingly cautious.

Today, the organizations that are the public face of U.S. feminism are old, bureaucratic and top-down, shaped by careerism and Washington politics. Their organizational culture is so permeated by U.S. free market business ideology that they could be called corporate feminists—they build top-down organizations, concentrate on fundraising and think in terms of building their own brand and market share, not of building a broad movement. NOW, the Feminist Majority and the National Women's Political Caucus have big budgets to meet; they need visibility to raise money and have been utterly shaped by interaction with the state, so their perspective is always, "What will help with lobbying, what will help in the next election?" Their political allegiance belongs to the Democratic Party rather than to any mass base of women.

Corporate feminist campaigns tend to be narrowly constructed in gender terms, around the most middle-class vision of feminist goals—breaking the glass ceiling, for instance, rather than raising the floor and giving everyone a living wage. For the most part, they avoid issues like globalization, war or the environment and hold back from union drives and campaigns for welfare rights. For this reason, few younger women activists—even those who consider themselves feminist—identify with the mainstream women's

movement. Some of these younger feminists work in the women of color movement, in organizations like Incite!, SisterSong and the Women of Color Resource Center. Some work in labor, antiwar or anti-globalization groups, or in grassroots groups that focus on economic or racial justice issues, though they complain that it is hard to get these groups to take up gender. Some work as junior staff in mainstream nonprofits, reproductive rights organizations or global feminist or human rights campaigns, where they have little voice.

Though young feminists have much in common politically with left-wing feminists of the second wave, and there is informal networking and some coalition work on specific issues, mainstream organizations remain the public face of U.S. feminism. They spin the issues their way, while everyone else plays catch-up. This is what happened in the primary debate between Clinton and Obama. While mainstream feminists went all out for Hillary—and some Obama supporters joined in sexist attacks on her—left-wing feminists tried to frame a coherent response to both, without having a collective voice or national organization to serve as a platform.

Though a woman in the White House would certainly be a potent symbol and an inspiration to all our daughters, it's open to debate how much the election of Hillary Clinton as President would actually have changed things for U.S. women. But mainstream feminists declared her candidacy the be-all and end-all of our struggle. They brought the same kind of fervor to her campaign that they had brought to the ERA in the late 1970s, when they told the rest of the women's movement we should drop everything else until that got passed.

Putting all your eggs in one basket is a terrible strategy, all the more so if the basket is a largely symbolic one. A movement that has a broad program with many goals will win some and lose some. A movement that has only one object—passing a constitutional amendment or electing a particular politician—loses an awful lot when it fails to meet its goal. But the U.S. women's movement will probably keep pursuing this narrow strategy until left-wing feminists build our own formation capable of giving alternative leadership a much more visible and viable public presence.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Some feminists who supported Hillary Clinton argued that gender oppression is more enduring and intractable than racism. Why do you think this point of view provoked so much controversy?
2. Do you think that some of Clinton's remarks appealed to racist sentiments during the primary campaign?
3. According to Tax, left-wing feminists believe that women's issues are not limited to explicit gender concerns but include questions of war and peace, the environment, workers' rights and economic justice. Do you think these issues should be part of the feminist agenda? Why? Why not?
4. Do you agree with the author's view that the sharp debate among feminists during the Democratic primary reflected a fundamental divergence on political strategy? If so, is this divergence evident outside the context of the 2008 presidential campaign? In what ways?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Obama and Clinton platforms on key women's issues
2. Obama administration policies on women's issues
3. Orientation of mainstream and left-wing feminist organizations toward the Obama administration



Obama's Victory and the Myth of Post-Racialism

By Clarence Lusane

As I waited for the results on election night, I received a phone call from a reporter. At one point in the interview, he asked me how long I had waited in line. My reply: 389 years.

For *Black America*, there was surely no single greater milestone to be reached than achieving the presidency of the United States. Shirley Chisholm, Jesse Jackson and many others tried. There were fictional Black presidents, serious and ludicrous, on television and in the movies. A few novels—mostly sci-fi, of course. And, in a seemingly ridiculous assertion, the prediction of a future Black president by RFK, way back when.

But the number of Black, white, brown, yellow, red, red (the political), blue (the political) and other Americans who actually believed that they would see a Black president in their lifetime was smaller than the number of people who think George W. Bush should be inducted into the Mensa Society. Despite the remarkable and stunning numbers rolling in on election night—most notably, Obama wins in the former Confederate states of North Carolina, Virginia and in reliably Republican Indiana—it was not until 11:01:01 p.m. that the networks felt safe to actually say that Obama had won, that it really struck home.

It was not the revolution. But it comes as close to a moment of collective transcendent history as any event we will ever see or be a part of in our lives or in the lifetime of the country. The country can retreat on the extension of civil and political rights to Blacks, as it did after Reconstruction and during the Reagan era. Conservative administrations and movements can abandon or outlaw affirmative action, as hap-

pened in California, Washington and Florida, and as was unsuccessfully attempted in the 2008 election in Colorado. George W. Bush can let New Orleans, the city that produced jazz—that great American, Black-generated music—drown. But neither he nor the race reactionaries can undo the election of Barack Obama. And this is the feeling that Obama supporters have embraced across all the boundaries and dividing lines.

But, within days of the election, radically different interpretations of the meaning of the election and its significance for American race relations surfaced. Almost immediately, conservative and some mainstream pundits began to declare the end of racism in the United States. How could a nation be racist any longer if it had just elected someone from a segment of the population that had endured legal segregation within living memory? With not only a Black president, but two current Black governors, two past Secretaries of State, two Supreme Court Justices—one past and one present—and the largest minority bloc in history in the U.S. House of Representatives, surely Blacks could no longer complain about social exclusion, discrimination or white bigotry.

Race was over as a determinant variable in the lives of Black Americans and, presumably, other racial and ethnic minorities. The American people had grown beyond their racial past and were embracing, as Martin Luther King Jr. advocated, the “content

of their character.” The evidence—Obama’s election—was clear and irrefutable, the contention went. Racism was no longer an issue because the nation had become colorblind.

The ideological and political aim of this argument was to marginalize the confrontational politics of the militant wing of the civil rights movement and traditional Black nationalists—conveniently ignoring, of course, their nearly universal support of Obama. It was also aimed at undermining legislative and policy initiatives on the part of the states and the federal government as ameliorative actions to end racial disparities and discrimination. There is little danger that the majority of Black Americans, who will continue to live in the world of gross racial disparities, police shootings and institutional racism, will buy this assertion. Its real targets are policymakers, the mass media and those who genuinely or disingenuously want to get past the racial discord that has long defined the nation. The notion of a post-racial society is not only factually wrong, but politically hazardous as well. Reagan-era arguments about personal responsibility are already reemerging in the ideological debate.

THE END OF RACISM?

In the wake of the election, conservative Black commentator Juan Williams, writing in the *Wall Street Journal* is blunt in his take on the significance of the Obama win. He writes, “Barack Obama’s election is both an astounding political victory—and the end of an era for black politics.”¹ After citing Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice and Clarence Thomas as examples of Black achievement, he goes on to contend that the “extortion-like” politics of the Reverends Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and Jeremiah Wright will become a “form of nostalgia.” Racial problems from now on, according to Williams and others, will center on being responsible regarding family obligations, overthrowing gangsta cultures and pragmatic, race-neutral solutions to social problems.

Williams’s fallacious assumptions are many, but two stand out. One is that the election of one Black person to the White House sweeps away hundreds of years of accumulated social and economic development and institutions distorted by racism. Vast and persis-

tent racial disparities in criminal justice, education, healthcare, housing and environmental hazards, to name a few, did not disappear on the night of election.

The second issue is the assumption that most of white America voted for Obama and for a new era of racial harmony. The facts tell a different and more complicated story. According to exit polls, Obama won 43 percent of the white vote, an increase of two percentage points over what Kerry won in 2004 and about the same as Clinton won in 1996. In effect, the white vote for Democrats has not budged in many, many years and has not been a majority in over 40 years. By all credible analysis, Obama won primarily by building a coalition of Black and Latino voters, and young voters of all colors. Project Vote, which has done a comparative analysis of the 2008 turnout, documents a large surge of voters of color, an increase of 21 percent compared to 2004. At the same time, white votes cast actually dropped. And the youth vote, 18-29 year olds—which overwhelmingly went to Obama—grew by 9 percent from 2004.²

Unlike Juan Williams, Obama’s opponents had no illusions about the salience of racism. During the campaign, racially coded language was used to great effect by Clinton and by McCain/Palin to tap into the racial prejudices of white voters. Clinton’s polarizing statement about “hard-working Americans” was a thinly veiled appeal to white working-class voters that likely helped with her wins in Ohio and Pennsylvania. For their part, McCain and Palin not only played the anti-Black card, but the anti-Muslim one as well. From references to Obama’s middle name, Hussein, to accusing him of “palling around with terrorists,” the McCain campaign consistently sought to inject racially loaded questions about Obama’s character into the campaign.

Even more, at Palin’s rallies, participants screamed overt racist chants, shouted out in inflammatory language, and hurled accusations about Obama’s “links to terrorists.” All this was encouraged by the candidate to the point that the Secret Service requested that the campaign tone down the rhetoric because of the spike in death threats toward Obama and his family in the aftermath of these events. While Williams and others may argue that Obama won in spite of these efforts, a more credible view is that he would have won by an

1. Williams, Juan “What Obama’s Victory Means for Racial Politics,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 10, 2008.

2. Herman, Jody and Lorraine Minnite, “The Demographics of Voters in America’s 2008 General Election: A Preliminary Assessment,” Research Memo, Project Vote, November 18, 2008. www.projectvote.org.



THE JOURNEY HAS NEVER BEEN TO ACHIEVE BENEFITS FOR A FEW AT THE TOP BUT FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE MANY AT THE BOTTOM.

even larger margin if the election had stayed focused strictly on the issues.

An even more defining piece regarding the post-racial thesis appeared in the *New York Times* prior to the election. Matt Bai put forth the proposition that perhaps Obama's rise signals the end of Black politics altogether. According to Bai, a new generation of Black politicians—from Newark Mayor Cory Booker to Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick and others—represents a paradigm shift wherein race is neutralized as the most effective means of addressing issues facing poor Black communities. Bai constructs two straw men—an undifferentiated, protest-driven, Black civil rights mafia and a young, enlightened, modernist talented tenth—locked in mortal combat for the political soul of Black, and white, America. The titular head of the latter group, symbolically and through voter legitimation, is Obama. Bai, as well as Williams, also assumes a gender bias that erases Black women from both groups.

It is important to view Black politics in its horizontal dimension rather than evoking a vertical hierarchy that locates civil rights above Black nationalism or vice versa. The politics of civil rights, Black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, conservatism, integrationism and socialism compete with and complement each other as they vie for acceptance as paths to democracy and justice for Blacks.

In fact, the broad spectrum of politics in the Black community crosses generation, class, gender, age and arenas of activism. Black support for Obama did not magically arise as a spontaneous rebuke of the civil rights leadership; it developed, in part, as a result of a consciously managed process that involved direct collaboration between the campaign and Black leaders across the board. Obama held regular conference calls, for example, with heads of the civil rights organiza-

tions throughout the race, ties that will not vanish now that he has won the election.

Obama will not, in fact cannot, govern as a “Black” president. Yet issues of race will take on an especially significant tone during his administration. Obama's victory is not a negation of Black politics, but represents its extension into the realm of presidential governance. Since there has never been a Black president, it is the one position in which a person of color has never been evaluated in the manner that Black mayors, governors and congressmembers have been critically analyzed in political, journalistic and analytical circles. Whether Obama turns out to be one of America's greatest presidents or one of its worst, his tenure will be nevertheless located, in part, at the nexus where Black politics and American politics meet. Given the confluence of circumstances that he faced entering into office, along with unknown events to come, it certainly will not be an uneventful presidency. And, inevitably, there will be some disappointments. In a nation as race-sensitive as the United States, Obama's policies, politics and behavior will be seen through the prism of race not only by Blacks, but by other racial groups as well.

OBAMA'S WHITE SUPPORT

It would be a mistake, however, to reduce Obama's success to a victory just for Black America. His triumph is a collective one that highlights the persistence of the long struggle for democracy by a wide range of communities and constituencies. In this light, his win is a benefit for the nation and the world as a whole. And for once, at least in this era, nearly the entire world also rejoiced at that moment. In villages, towns, cities, favelas, barrios, prisons, army bases, cafes and public spaces around the globe, people celebrated. If

3. Kromm, Chris, “Election 2008: The Generation Gap: Young white voters in the South,” Institute for Southern Studies, November 12, 2008. www.southernstudies.org/2008/11/election-2008-generation-gap-young.html.



this was false consciousness, then it was an international manifestation of it.

Obama, of course, could not have won without substantial white support, and indeed, he made some incredible breakthroughs with white voters. He could not have been victorious in traditional Republican states such as North Carolina and Virginia, for example, with only Black voters. Even in the rest of the South, where he was soundly defeated, he won significant votes among young whites. As the Institute for Southern Studies reports, about 40 percent or more of the young voters in the region went for Obama, including 56 percent in North Carolina.³

The post-racialists celebrate the willingness of a growing number of whites, disproportionately young, to vote for Black candidates, but fail to explain why. There are at least three reasons. First, civil rights and other Black leaders have been successful in exposing the lingering and persistent nature of racism and racial disparities. Clearly, there are many whites who become anti-racist because they are open to this information. Second, the unacceptability of explicit racism in the public sphere crosses party lines. (See, for example, Bush's bailing on Trent Lott after Lott's racist comments on the occasion of Strom Thurmond's birthday.) This made Palin's venture into these politics problematic for John McCain. Despite a hardcore racist, anti-immigrant, Islamophobic wing in the party, most Republicans know that they actually turn off voters when they go too far in that direction. Third, in the more immediate sense, the Obama-Democratic win was the fulcrum with which we repudiated conservatism and Republican Party politics. Obama, for many, was the vehicle for the solid rejection of more than a decade of the most regressive government in recent memory. The hapless campaign of John McCain embodied the deadly combination of contradictions that Bush-era Republicans face: a base split between competing cultural, social and economic constituencies; an economic collapse popularly linked to the failed tenets of neo-liberalism; unnecessary wars of choice whose costs in lives and resources are too high to tolerate even for many patriotic Republicans; and party demographics that are more reflective of 1908 than 2008.

Obama's win, our victory, is also concurrently a repudiation of the conservatism that has dominated American politics for 40 or more years. Built expressly on racial fear, class prejudices, imperial global relations and deregulated markets, conservative Republicans and opportunistic Democratic administrations in the 1980s and 1990s attempted to roll back the social and legislative advances of the Great Depression and the Great Society. But especially under the George W. Bush administration and the hyper-reactionary Republican Congress of 1995-2007, the nation and the world experienced the most aggressive retreat on political and human rights imaginable. All the while, transnational corporations, disproportionately U.S.-based, pillaged the nation and the world with the full assistance of the anti-government government of Bush.

With each milestone in racial life in the United States, the trope of "post-racialism" is dusted off and once again used by its proponents to call for an end to real, substantive progress in achieving racial equality. Indeed, advocacy of post-racialism has emerged from prominent people of color such as Republican National Committee chairman Michael Steele, who is Black, and Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, who is Indian American. However, the impulse to close the door on race must be resisted. Well-documented and persistent racial disparities—driven by institutional racism, inadequate public policy and racial blinders remind us on a daily basis of the unfinished agenda of equal rights. The journey has never been to achieve benefits for a few at the top but for the advancement of the many at the bottom.

Obama has called for, and he should receive, fierce support for the progressive-leaning dimensions of his political and policy agenda—ending the war in Iraq, building a green capitalist economy, reforming the health care system, etc.—and fierce opposition to its more conservative and harmful aspects. The Obama administration must also be pushed to fulfill its promise to address the urban issues that have been left to fester for decades. Fears of being called a hostage to race politics must be dismissed and a real—rather than imagined—effort to reach equality forged in the years ahead.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Obama's Victory and the Myth of Post-Racialism | By Clarence Lusane

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Lusane calls Obama's election a "moment of collective transcendent history." Do you agree with this characterization? What is your evidence?
2. Why do you think some pundits equated Obama's election with the beginning of a post-racial society? What is their reasoning?
3. What are the policy implications of the assertion that Obama's victory heralds the end of racism in the U.S.A.?
4. What is at stake for Black institutions in the "post-racial" debate?
5. Lusane call the notion that we're living in a post-racial world "politically hazardous." What do you think he means?
6. Discuss the author's view that Obama's election is not a rejection of Black politics but its extension into "the realm of presidential governance."
7. Lusane offers three reasons that white voters chose Obama. Do you agree with his analysis? Can you think of other reasons?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Lusane identifies a broad spectrum of Black politics. Were there differences in attitudes towards Obama across this spectrum? What were they?
2. Have pundits and journalists continued with the post-racial theme since the election?



The Immigrant Rights Agenda and the 2008 Elections

By Catherine Tactaquin

Just days after the election, on November 8, 2008, Marcelo Lucero, an Ecuadorian and resident of the U.S. for 16 years, was murdered in a small town in Suffolk County, New York. Seven teens were arrested in the murder; they had reportedly decided to “beat up on some Mexicans” and found Lucero on his way to a friend’s house. Suffolk County is one of several New York areas where hate crimes against Latinos have risen dramatically. The FBI reports that Latino males have been the targets of over 62 percent of reported acts of hate violence nationwide. Many in Suffolk County blamed the murder on the anti-immigrant climate generated by the immigration debate.

Anti-immigrant leaders quickly tried to distance themselves from accusations that their rhetoric helped to fuel such violence. In fact, after the November elections the anti-immigrant right appeared momentarily confused by their defeats at the polls. But they have quickly regrouped, and, since the inauguration, they have stepped up efforts on all fronts to attack any “soft spot” for immigration in the White House and to expand and consolidate their local and state efforts. They see in the economic crisis a lot of material to advance a racist, anti-immigrant agenda.

The fact that immigration did not prominently emerge as a national hot-button issue in the 2008 elections did provide some relief from the relentless pattern of raids, detentions and deportations that has characterized immigration policy over the past several years. This time around, the anti-immigrant right failed to wield immigration as a wedge issue to elect

their candidates. However, the presence and messaging that they have built up over the years have had a powerful impact, leading national candidates to distance themselves from the controversy, only paying lip service to the call for immigration reforms when addressing Latino and other immigrant-based communities.

Obama has thus far been very careful not to speak negatively about undocumented immigrants, even citing his concerns about the “separation” of parents from their children, a common result of immigration raids and deportations. While there are considerable challenges to winning Obama’s support for bold immigration reforms including generous legalization, decriminalization of immigrants, and the demilitarization of the southern border, he could be a major force in deflating the racist agenda of the anti-immigrant right and its substantial presence in the national media. Especially in a period of economic crisis, which historically



has heightened the appeal of anti-immigrant initiatives, Obama's commitment to fairness and equity would go a long way towards framing a more principled debate and widening the organizing space for what is certain to be a still-contentious debate on immigration.

Immigration is, and will likely continue to be, one of the thorniest issues for the Obama Administration. There are some 12 million undocumented immigrants in this country,¹ a global economic crisis that is already contributing to a growing number of displaced people looking for economic survival and growing political pressure from affected immigrant communities and allies to act on immigration reforms. Adding to the complexity is the fact that immigration has never lined up cleanly along party lines, and some issues—such as guest worker proposals and worksite and southern border enforcement—trigger strong and divergent positions within and between the parties, as well as among communities and advocates. The issues are complicated, and the subtle but important differences on positions are often lost—including among progressives.

Issues such as real legalization, an expansion of legal immigration, detention, access to due process and the demilitarization of the U.S.-Mexico border face uphill battles and may not be fully addressed within the first term of the Obama presidency. All indications are that the new president will be cautious in supporting any significantly more progressive proposals on any of these issues.

In an "Open Letter" to Obama that was signed by some 3,500 supporters, the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (www.nnirr.org) urged the president to end immigration raids in the first 100 days of his new administration, a sentiment echoed in similar messages from all around the country. The letter proposed that a moratorium would provide a respite from the persistent pattern of raids, detentions and deportations while charting a "new direction" and a departure from the policies of the Bush years. Ending raids could be accomplished administratively, through an Executive Order or other action, and is being urged by the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and other policymakers. While this would be a positive step, last year such raids netted less than 2 percent

of the immigrants who were deported. Ending the detention and deportation of more than 350,000 immigrants a year will be a far more daunting challenge and would mean a dramatic policy shift.

During the lead up to the November elections, immigrant rights supporters had been rightly concerned that immigration would once again get dragged through the muck and mire of election politics as candidates rushed to establish their anti-immigration credentials. A controversial, bipartisan immigration reform bill had failed to pass in the last Congress.

But in this national election, with the candidacy of Barack Obama elevating attention to a broad cross-section of social and economic issues, and with the presence of a more influential Latino vote in several closely contested states, the risk of alienating potential voters by championing a harsh immigration position clearly outweighed the benefits. And perhaps the recent memory of millions of immigrants rallying in cities across the country in 2006 in response to the House passage of the anti-immigrant Sensenbrenner bill tempered the Republicans' enthusiasm for their enforcement-heavy immigration platform.

In the second presidential debate on October 7, 2008, immigration was not even mentioned, despite attempts by immigrant rights advocates, as well as pundits on the right, to elicit candidate responses. In order to garner Latino support, John McCain's campaign launched a series of ads in Spanish attacking Barack Obama for helping to kill immigration legislation—a charge immediately repudiated by Obama and his supporters. Anti-immigrant lobbyists like the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), together with population control proponents, secured ads in the *New York Times* and elsewhere blaming immigration for the energy crisis and the Wall Street crash. But their transparent scapegoating did not appear to catch much fire as voters zeroed in on the economic crisis and the continuing debate over the war in Iraq.

In several congressional races, conservative candidates, boasting of their anti-immigrant credentials and backed by nativist groups, lost their elections. Most notably, Lou Barletta, the mayor of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, was defeated in his bid for a congressional

1. Passel, Jeffrey S. and Cohn D'Vera, Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States," April 14, 2009. www.pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=107

seat. In 2006, Barletta achieved some national fame among nativist groups for pushing the Hazelton City Council to adopt a law denying housing to undocumented immigrants and denying business permits to companies hiring undocumented workers. Election analysts claim that 19 of 21 congressional candidates who attempted to use immigration as a wedge issue against their opponents lost their races.²

Given the overall dynamics of the 2008 elections, and the defeat of Republican candidates at various levels, it is not clear that these defeats can be attributed to immigration positions alone. Most polling of Latino and Asian voters revealed that, while a candidate's position on immigration was often one of the factors that influenced how people voted, it was not necessarily the deciding factor. Like many other voters, Latinos and Asian Americans cited jobs and the economy as the most important issues of the election. Immigration was included among critical issues for many Latino voters. Civil rights and immigrant rights came in sixth among the concerns of Asian voters.

Whenever immigration was raised as an issue, the positions of candidates from both the Republican and Democratic parties shifted right. For example, presidential candidate John McCain, criticized as being too soft by fellow Republicans, abandoned his "maverick" stance on immigration and proclaimed that borders had to be "secured" before tackling immigration policy reforms—a position once held only by the anti-immigrant hardliners in Congress.

The anti-immigrant blocs in the House and Senate, which have grown over the past few years, lost members in the 2008 elections. But they are still sizable bodies capable of impacting immigration policies and legislation. According to Devin Burghart of the Center for New Community, "[T]he nativist bloc in Congress, the House Immigration Reform Caucus (HIRC), finished the 2008 election almost exactly

where the HIRC was at the end of the 2006 election—a major political obstruction." The HIRC has 91 members going into the 111th Congress. Its Senate counterpart, the Border Security Caucus, has nine members, having lost Sen. Elizabeth Dole, who failed in her re-election bid.³

Another immigration story in the 2008 election was about immigrant voters. Over 3 million immigrants became new U.S. citizens between the 2004 and 2008 elections; well over 1 million became citizens between October 2007 and October 2008. In this last election, significantly more attention and resources were given to this sector, particularly through the no-holds-barred election strategy of the Democratic Party and its supporters.

Despite some media speculation—particularly from Republican spin-meisters—that Latino and Asian voters might be reluctant to vote for a Black candidate, the election outcome told a striking story:

- Exit polling showed that over 60 percent of Latinos voted for Obama, and the percentage was even higher among foreign born—about 70 percent. (Over 11 million Latinos are estimated to have voted in the presidential election, an increase of over 30 percent since 2004.)⁴
- According to an exit poll conducted in 11 cities by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, diverse Asian American voters supported Obama by a 3-1 margin over McCain. Obama received the support of 82 percent of first-time Asian American voters, 87 percent of U.S.-born Asian Americans and 74 percent of foreign-born naturalized citizens.

Many commentators have observed that the Latino vote was critical in delivering the presidential victory to Barack Obama in states like Indiana and contributed significantly to his wins in Nevada, Colorado and

2. "More Immigration Losers: GOP hardliners need to face reality," *Wall Street Journal, Review & Outlook*. December 2, 2008. www.online.wsj.com/article/SB122817746374470763.html

3. Devin Burghart, "Nativism and Election 2008," *Searchlight Magazine*, December 2008.

4. "Surge in Hispanic Vote", November 2008. Working Immigrants. Posted by Peter Rousmaniere. February 3, 2009. www.workingimmigrants.com/2009/02/surge_in_hispanic_vote_novembe.html

5. Steve Cobble and Joe Velasquez, "Obama's Latino Mandate," in *The Nation*. altnet.org/story/107835/ Posted on November 20, 2008, printed on Nov. 22, 2008.

6. Lopez, Mark Hugo, Pew Hispanic Center, "The Hispanic Vote in the 2008 Election," November 7, 2008. www.pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=98



New Mexico, all of which changed from red to blue states in November.⁵ In Texas, where Latinos constituted 20 percent of the voters, some 63 percent voted for Obama, who garnered 44 percent of the overall vote, a gain for the Democrats of 6 percentage points over the 2004 general election results.⁶

Now, immigrant rights advocates across the political spectrum are hopeful that the broad push for remedies to concerns made worse under Bush and the overwhelming turnout of immigrant voters in support of Barack Obama will translate into both the political will to change policy and support for immigration reform.

Immigrant rights advocates and activists have wasted no time moving immigration issues onto the agenda of the new administration and the 111th Congress. In light of the failure of immigration reform efforts over the past several years and the continued rise in repressive immigration enforcement measures and practices, immigrant rights groups are understandably eager to ensure that immigration concerns are addressed effectively and expeditiously.

Immigrant rights and faith-based supporters marched and heard immigrant testimony in Washington the day after the Inauguration, and letters from several constituent groups supporting immigration reform were sent to the White House. Activists have rallied around the country to protest anti-immigrant Sheriff Joe Arpaio in Arizona; to call for Temporary Protected Status for Haitian deportees; and to demand accountability and changes in detention centers, where several immigrants have died just since the beginning of 2009.

But with the economy understandably taking center stage, immigrant rights advocates have been cautious in projecting a timetable for legislative reforms. It is an open question whether the Obama Administration, Congress and the Democratic Party will be willing or able to address immigration before the campaign for the 2012 presidential race—and presumably for a second term for Barack Obama—heats up.

Since taking office in January, Obama has reaffirmed his commitment to pursue immigration reforms. In a radio interview with Eddie “Piolin” Sotelo, the Chicago radio host who in 2006 helped to spark community turnout for what turned out to be one of several massive demonstrations for immigrant rights, Obama

said that his priority would be to “improve the current system”—presumably through actions like cleaning up the pending visa application backlog—and then take up the job of comprehensive immigration reform. Obama’s prescription for immigration reform includes securing the borders, worksite enforcement and legalization for the undocumented, who will need to “go to the back of the line.” These are not exactly the kinds of proposals envisioned by progressive reformers.

Obama’s appointment of Janet Napolitano to head the Department of Homeland Security has provided some initial indication of the Administration’s approach to critical immigration issues. In a January 31 directive on immigration and border security, Napolitano, the former governor of Arizona, largely identifies avenues to “improve” on problematic Bush-era programs that advocates want to see ended.

For example, Napolitano called for a review and assessment of several programs and policies, including ways to expand the widely criticized 287(g) program, which provides for local and state collaboration in immigration enforcement. In a similar vein, she wants to study ways to increase the presence and effectiveness of the National Guard at the Southern border. Napolitano is also looking to expand the E-verify program while minimizing the program’s “false negatives.” E-verify, a system for employers to electronically verify the status of new hires, is an extension of the 1986 employer sanctions law that has led to increased criminalization and exploitation of immigrant workers. While E-verify is not now widely used by employers, it is so full of errors that it routinely provides “false negatives” for people who are authorized to work but are rejected by the system.

Most recently, Napolitano claimed she knew nothing beforehand about the first worksite raid of the new administration, which took place in Bellingham, Washington on February 24. After a massive protest of the raid by the immigrant rights community, Napolitano announced she would have it investigated. However, Napolitano’s directive made clear that she favors enhancement of enforcement programs to locate and deport undocumented immigrants.

While the Obama Administration considers administrative “fixes” to current immigration programs and buys some time before contentious immigration



legislation is advanced, the looming issue is *what type* of immigration reforms will take center stage. Considerable differences remain among immigrant rights advocates, as well as within the anti-immigrant camp, on priority issues and strategies for change.

Many organizations, including the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, the American Friends Service Committee, the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities, the Mexican American Political Association and others, disagreed with policy proposals advanced in the name of “comprehensive immigration reform” by Washington immigration lobbyists. While the term “comprehensive immigration reform” became the catch phrase for immigrant rights legislation, the sweeping legislation that was hammered together as a compromise bill in the Senate—the Kennedy-McCain bill—included concessions to increased enforcement and guest-worker programs as a “balance” or trade-off for legalization and other positive reforms. In the current debate, many advocates who continue to promote “CIR” are unaware or uncritical of those parts of the legislation that do harm by heightening the criminalization and racial stratification of immigrants and increasing the potential for abuse and discrimination, among other problems.

Despite the defeat of the Republicans in the presidential race and their loss of a considerable number of seats in Congress, the immigration battle will still be very difficult. Immigration is one of the main issues where party loyalties can be, and often are, divided. In the last session of Congress, Republican hard-liners pressured McCain on his role in crafting the bipartisan compromise bill. During the presidential campaign, he said he would no longer support such a bill and campaigned on the position that he would not consider immigration reforms until the governors of Southern border states certified that the borders were secure, thereby framing immigration as principally an issue of national security.

While the Democrats announced that immigration would be among their top ten pieces of legislation in this session of Congress, the bill described in Senate Majority Leader Reid’s list of legislative priorities would heighten border enforcement and expand worksite enforcement in addition to working on avenues for legal immigration.

The gamut of anti-immigrant groups—the Federation for American Immigration Reform, Center for Immigration Studies and others—along with pundits

like Lou Dobbs and Rush Limbaugh have flooded Congress and the media, intent on warding off any motion on the immigration issue by the White House. They have attributed the economic crisis to the presence of undocumented immigrants in the workforce and revitalized their immigrants-take-Americans’-jobs line. They have even used the tragic murder of Marcelo Lucero to argue for more restrictions.

The right will also most certainly continue to move their anti-immigrant agenda at the state and local levels with the introduction of voter initiatives and legislation. While many of these initiatives have not been successful, anti-immigrant voices have typically dominated the public debate, shifting arguments to the right and increasing public tolerance of overtly racist or racially coded language regarding immigrants. As Tarso Luís Ramos pointed out in *The Public Eye* (“On Immigration: Clearing Smoke, Cracking Mirrors,” Winter 2008), the state-level campaigns have “framed the terms of debate well beyond a few retrograde statehouses, putting new immigrant communities on the defensive even in ‘integrative’ locales like New York, where in ’07 then-Governor Spitzer withdrew his driver’s license plan for the undocumented under a hailstorm of criticism.” He added, “The creation of an anti-immigrant climate, in which unauthorized immigrants are reduced to the criminal label ‘illegals,’ is itself an achievement for the White nationalists who comprise the backbone of the movement.”

There is no doubt that the White House plays a pivotal role in the tone and nature of the public debate on immigration. Ronald Reagan certainly played this role in the 1980s when he spoke about the “hordes” of immigrants flooding across the southern border and opened wide the door to years of openly racist, ugly diatribes against immigration. Yet, even in the midst of that period, landmark immigration legislation was passed that eventually resulted in the legalization of over 4 million undocumented immigrants, while also setting in place the cornerstone restrictions that cemented the criminalization of undocumented immigrant workers. This time around, an invigorated immigrant-based electorate and community, allied with labor, faith and others to push the Administration for the “change we need,” could win sufficient support for reforms to not only ease the targeted immigration abuses of the past two decades but also make real progress in the quest to define and defend immigrant and refugee rights.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

The Immigrant Rights Agenda and the 2008 Elections

By Catherine Tactaquin

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Tactaquin identifies several “bold immigration reforms.” What makes these reforms bold? Why do you think these reforms are controversial?
2. What actions have immigrant rights organizations taken to put immigration on the agenda?
3. Why do you think the right wing was unsuccessful in using immigration as a wedge issue during the 2008 elections?
4. What policies and practices from the Bush years are most objectionable to immigrants’ rights leaders?
5. How do you think the changing demographics of the electorate affects candidates’ handling of immigration issues?
6. How has Obama positioned himself in relation to immigration issues?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Program and strategies of key immigrant rights organizations
2. Program and strategies of key anti-immigrant organizations
3. Role of conservative media in stoking anti-immigrant sentiment
4. Key congressional supporters and opponents of immigrant rights legislation

Obama's Candidacy

The Advent of Post-Racial America and the End of Black Politics?

By Linda Burnham

Obama's candidacy and electoral victory provoked a torrent of observations and speculations about race in America—some grounded in reality, some approaching the realm of sheer fantasy. In the latter category are the commentaries heralding the advent of a “post-racial America” and “the end of Black politics.”

Matt Bai, in an August 10, 2008 *New York Times* article entitled “Is Obama the End of Black Politics?,” offered up one of the more coherent versions of the genre. In it, he argues that a newly emerging generation of Ivy-bred Black elected officials, with Obama as their chief representative, is more interested in representing universal interests than in representing the Black community; that therefore “black politics might now be disappearing into American politics in the same way that the Irish and Italian machines long ago joined the political mainstream;” and that an Obama win would likely undermine the argument for race-based measures such as affirmative action.

The post-racial, end-of-Black-politics crowd bases its case on at least five fallacies:

FALLACY #1: The end of a racially unjust society is a declarative act.

Some commentators seem to be confused by the forms racism takes in the post-civil rights era and are prepared to declare that, since there are no laws explicitly upholding racial inequity, it must be dying out of its own accord.

Racial apartheid and the most blatant 20th century

forms of discrimination are behind us, but the color-line has hardly faded away. Centuries of affirmative action for whites built up an enormous wealth gap, along with stubborn inequities along nearly every other economic and social parameter. Active discrimination persists, especially in employment and housing, as the experience of testers repeatedly confirms. (According to the *New York Times*'s own poll, “nearly 70 per cent of blacks said they had encountered a specific instance of discrimination based on their race, compared with 62 per cent in 2000.”¹) Millions of white people—most of them lacking control of the resources required to actively discriminate—nonetheless make daily choices about which neighborhood to move in to or out of, which schools to send their kids to. Too often, those choices amount to the preservation of white space and the privileges that attach to it. And the gains of the freedom movements of the 1950s and '60s came under attack before the ink was dry on the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act—and have been under attack ever since. Meanwhile, nominally race-neutral policies—particularly those related to the social safety net, criminal justice and tax policy—have a disproportionately negative impact on people of

1. Nagourney, Adam and Megan Thee, “Poll Shows Racial Division on Obama's Candidacy,” *New York Times*, July 15, 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/07/15/us/politics/15cnd-poll.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&csq=racial%20discrimination%20poll%202008&st=cse&scp=3.



color, hardening and often widening the racial divide. And the globalization of the demand for labor, in the absence of the protection of the laborers themselves, has stoked a toxic mix of nativism and racism.

This is not the picture of a post-racial society.

Social reality is rude. It tends to break through even the most sophisticated screens designed to mask it. The Katrina debacle, the repeated exposure of the debasement of immigrant labor, the disproportionate impact of the housing crisis and the generalized recession in communities of color—all these phenomena attest to the continuing salience of racial inequity and bring the conversation about race out of the post-racialist clouds and back to earth.

FALLACY #2: The sum total of Black politics is electoral politics.

There are many forms of political leadership among Blacks, as is true for other racially or ethnically distinct groups. Elected representatives are critical and central to moving policy, but religious leaders, community organizers, think tankers, opinion leaders, policy advocates, legal strategists and politicized artists and cultural figures all give shape, texture and substance to the complex thing that is Black politics. The complete collapse of the political into the electoral ill serves a community that has been so ill served by mainstream politics. Challenging power requires the coordination and synchronization of many different actors, some located within legitimized structures, some working well outside the mainstream. Furthermore, while the politics of protest and mass action may be in extended abeyance, a death certificate is probably premature.

FALLACY #3: The most legitimate Black leaders are those elected representatives who are most legitimated in the eyes of whites.

The promoters of the “end of black politics” draw a sharp generational divide between the confrontational protest style of the Jesse Jackson generation, who are constructed as speaking to and for “only” the interests of Blacks, and the more universalist approach of the

younger generation of politicians, as exemplified by the Corey Bookers and Deval Patricks of the world.

Gary Younge, writing in *The Nation*, addressed the careful selectivity of this view:

The emergence of this cohort has filled the commentariat with joy—not just because of what they are: bright, polite and, where skin tone is concerned, mostly light—but because of what they are not. They have been hailed not just as a development in black American politics but as a repudiation of black American politics; not just as different from Jesse Jackson but the epitome of the anti-Jesse.

There are many problems with this. Chief among them is that this “new generation” is itself a crude political construct built more on wishful thinking than on chronological fact. Patrick, born in 1956, is hailed as part of it, but hapless New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, who was born the same year, and civil rights campaigner Al Sharpton, who was born just two years earlier, are not. Obama and Booker are always mentioned as members of this new club, but Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr., who was born between them and spent his twenty-first birthday in prison protesting apartheid, is not.

So whatever else this is about, it is not just about years. It is one thing to say there is a critical mass of black politicians of a certain age and political disposition. It is entirely another to claim that they represent the views of a generation.²

This view also rewrites and narrows the politics of Jesse Jackson, Martin King and a generation of leaders—many of whom were, and still are, clear that racial justice for Blacks is central to deepening democracy for all Americans—who, through the civil rights movement and the Rainbow Coalition, mobilized, inspired and transformed the political thinking not only of Blacks but of millions of other people of color and whites, as well.

Finally, this view posits associations between Black politics and parochialism, mainstream politics and universalism, and white politics and ...? Actually, in this view there is no such thing as white politics—that

2. Younge, Gary, “The Obama Effect,” *The Nation*, December 13, 2007, www.thenation.com/doc/20071231/younge



WE WILL NOT REACH A POST-RACIALIST U.S. BY ANNOUNCEMENT OR DECREE. THE ONLY WAY TO GET THERE FROM HERE IS BY WAY OF RACIAL JUSTICE.

is, politics that represent the interests of whites as a group—only universalist politics inclusive of all and the narrow, race-based, Black politics of the past.

Put fallacies # 2 and #3 together and you get the absurd notions that the undeniably significant expression of politics represented by Obama, Booker, Patrick et al. is the sum total of Black politics—a claim not even they would make—and that the future of Black politics depends, first and foremost, upon its appeal to white voters.

FALLACY #4: Black political expression is the Black equivalent of white ethnic voting and will soon fade as a distinct trend.

The most focused reflection of Black political consensus is the 90 percent and more of Black votes that regularly go to Democratic candidates in presidential elections. No other demographic votes in such a consistently and dramatically lopsided fashion. Whites split their votes, ranging between 55 and 60 percent Republican and 40 to 45 percent Democratic. Latino and Asian American votes split much more evenly than those of Blacks and vary more from one election to the next. So if, as Bai maintains, Black politics are “disappearing into American politics,” somebody better tell the Democrats, who are completely reliant on the consistency of that vote in presidential elections. Though 90 percent of 12 percent of the electorate is not enough to win the presidency, it’s something to build a campaign around, a stable factor in political strategizing when you can count on it every time. Blacks widely view the Republican Party as the chief protector of white interests. Until that changes—that

is, until the Republican Party changes its core platform—Blacks are unlikely to follow the course of Irish and Italian politics and disappear as a remarkably cohesive voting bloc, at least in presidential elections.

FALLACY #5: The progress of middle-class Blacks is a stand-in for the progress of Blacks in general.

Bai notes that “when millions of black Americans are catapulting themselves to success” it’s hard to make a case for the ongoing significance of race and racism. And nearly every election commentator has observed that the changed class configuration of Black America has given rise to a new political cohort: those who walked through the doors swung open by the gains of the civil rights movement and who are now themselves opening new doors in U.S. politics.

But in an era in which significant numbers of Blacks have substantially improved their social and economic standing, there are major countervailing trends: the Black poverty rate still hovers between 20 and 25 percent and remains more than twice that of whites; the class profile of Blacks is still weighted toward the bottom; while median income rose dramatically for Black women in the 30 years between 1974 and 2004, it fell for Black men; and those Blacks who do achieve middle-class status face much greater difficulty than whites in passing that status along to their children.

It may be that the biggest problem one segment of Blacks faces is whether they can hail a cab successfully in New York City. This is not the case for the Black majority.



And so, the issue is not whether Black politicians who aspire to represent a broader constituency can do so effectively. Undoubtedly they can. More to the point is whether they also have the orientation and the capacity to represent the interests of those who are disadvantaged on the basis of both race and class.

This will take more than lessons in uplift, finger-wagging at Black fathers and lectures on how to turn off the TV and help the kids with their homework.

* * *

Apart from these five fallacies, another thing that seems to confuse the post-racialists is that no one in the political mainstream makes overtly racist appeals to the white majority. So, they conclude, maybe racism is over with.

We can count it as a victory—only recently won in terms of the long arc of white supremacy—that blatant racism is widely viewed as morally repugnant. While it is the role of the activist right to preserve the prerogatives of racial hierarchy, they'd prefer to do so without being tagged as the guardians of white power. Happy to claim their allegiance to unregulated markets, regressive tax policies, "family values," small government and robust militarism, the frank embrace of white supremacy is a bit beyond the pale.

Hence, they've become masterful shapeshifters, skilled at promulgating policies that protect white privilege while insisting that race is the furthest thing from their minds, and skilled at framing and controlling the national dialogue about race. Racist expression has taken new, coded and perverse forms. The presidential campaign itself provided more than enough evidence that some white politicians recognize the power of race-based appeals.

We now have:

Double-bind racism, in which those who make reference to the actually existing racial regime or advocate on behalf of anti-racist practices and policies are themselves accused of being racist, of "playing the race card." (The flap over Supreme Court nominee Sotomayor's stance that she may know something privileged white men don't.)

Dog-whistle racism, in which racist messages are conveyed on a separate frequency, through racially coded words and phrases, reaching ears that have been primed and are highly attuned. (Clinton's "hard working Americans" appeal to white working-class voters in Pennsylvania. Yep, the Dems do it, too.)

Color-blind racism, in which the racial status quo is sustained and defended by those who pledge allegiance to purportedly race-neutral policies. (Perfectly by opponents of affirmative action.)

Visually evocative racism, in which imagery is purposefully deployed to surface deeply engrained racial stereotypes. (The Paris Hilton/Britney Spears/McCain ad fandango.)

All these stratagems and more have been skillfully manipulated to stoke fear and resentment, undermine Black candidates, confuse potential allies, undercut the efficacy of racial justice organizing and advocacy, and silence the anti-racist voice. It is our job to learn to decode and expose these forms of expression for what they are—maneuvers to obstruct racial equity.

We will not reach a post-racialist U.S. by announcement or decree. The only way to get there from here is by way of racial justice. We can already identify some of the markers on that route: substantially diminishing disparities in health, education, housing, income distribution, wealth, police practices, sentencing and incarceration, political participation and representation. Whether we steadily approach these markers or they recede into a murky, unapproachably distant future depends, in large part, on the continuation and renewal of Black politics in diverse, increasingly effective forms.

Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

Obama's Candidacy: The Advent of Post-Racial America and the End of Black Politics? | By Linda Burnham

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How might those pundits who assert that we live in a post-racial society explain continuing racial disparities in jobs, income, health, housing, education and wealth? What are the policy implications of this perspective?
2. What do you think Burnham means by “affirmative action for whites?” Can you think of an example?
3. Burnham warns against the “collapse of the political into the electoral.” Are there political leaders in your community who are not elected officials? What roles do they play? To whom are they accountable?
4. Do you think that politicians who appeal specifically to the interests and concerns of Blacks are becoming a thing of the past? Why? Why not?
5. Do you think it is possible for an Black politician to run and win on a platform that is racially inclusive while also speaking to the particular concerns of Blacks? Why? Why not?
6. Can you think of other examples of “double-bind racism,” “dog-whistle racism,” “colorblind racism” or “visually evocative racism”?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Incorporation of white ethnic groups into the political process
2. Race-based appeals in past presidential elections
3. Platform and approach of Rainbow Coalition
4. Different racial impacts of economic crisis

The Compact for Racial Justice

An Agenda for Fairness and Unity

By Rinku Sen, Tammy Johnson
and Terry Keleher

Regardless of the victor on the night of the 2008 presidential election, one thing was clear: racism would not be resolved overnight with the election of one person.

That's why, during the months leading up to the election, the Applied Research Center (ARC), a national racial justice think tank, worked with allies to develop a set of principles to guide us through the changing landscape. Our goal has always been to bolster efforts to change public policy in ways that prioritize equity and inclusion for all people.

The Applied Research Center widely circulated a draft of the principles to racial justice activists and thinkers from across the country to solicit feedback. With the review and input of several thousands, ARC developed the Strategic Framework for Advancing Racial Equity. The Framework consists of the following six principles.

Strategic Framework for Advancing Racial Justice

1. Focus on *structural racism* and *systemic inequality* rather than simply *personal prejudice*. Structural racism—the overarching system of racial hierarchy and inequality that routinely privileges whites and disadvantages people of color—profoundly affects most issues and institutions in the U.S. In addition to addressing historic underpinnings and

root causes, speak to the cultural norms and popular ideas that contribute to current racial inequities.

2. Focus on *impacts* rather than *intentions*. Racially disparate impacts and outcomes, regardless of intent, are sufficient evidence that racism exists. Impacts can be documented, while intentions are debatable and difficult to prove. Rather than dwell on who is a racist, it's far more useful to focus on the causes and effects of racism.

3. Address racial inequality *explicitly* but not necessarily *exclusively*. We need to be able to see racism to eliminate it. Challenge so-called “colorblindness,” which denies the realities of racism and renders people of color invisible. Often other significant factors must also be made visible, such as gender, class, ethnicity, and immigrant status.

4. Propose solutions that emphasize *equity* and *inclusion* rather than *diversity*. Racism is pervasive, but it need not be permanent. Offer proactive solutions that are equitable, inclusive, and viable. It is important to distinguish the principle of equity, which is fairness, from that of diversity, which is about variety.

THIS “RACE-CONSCIOUS” APPROACH RAN COUNTER TO CURRENT GROWING NOTION OF “COLOR BLINDNESS” OR “POSTRACIALISM”.

- 5. Develop strategies to empower *stakeholders* and target institutional *powerholders*.** Build inclusive and cohesive cross-racial alliances that prioritize the full engagement of people of color as leaders. Hold accountable the decision-makers who have the authority to enact needed changes accountable for institutional racism.
- 6. Make *racial justice* a high priority in all social justice efforts.** A successful progressive movement must recognize racial justice as a central component of social justice. The struggle for racial justice is not a zero sum game. Instead of allowing racism to drive social division and disparities, we can make racial equity the driving force for uniting and benefiting all people.

These principles elevate the importance of explicitly addressing racial justice if long-standing racial disparities and divisions are to be overcome. This “race-conscious” approach ran counter to current growing notion of “color blindness” or “postracialism” and the accompanying conservative attacks on race-conscious remedies such as affirmative action and school integration programs.

To accompany the principles, the Applied Research Center developed a statement to contextualize and to articulate some key aspirations of a modern racial justice movement. This statement became the preamble of the “Compact for Racial Justice: An Agenda for Fairness and Unity.”¹

The Compact described a vision of a country in which:

- The needs of our children are fully met so that they can thrive and develop their unique gifts to contribute to the common good.
- A commitment to internationally recognized human rights, at home and abroad, structures our partnerships in the community of nations.

- The unwavering practice of justice and equity overcomes the centuries-old divisions of dominance and privilege along the color line.
- The global migration of humans is understood as a fundamental feature of our age, and all workers are compensated and routinely protected, whatever their place of birth.
- People choose partners, create families, and build households free from arbitrary, discriminatory limitations based on gender, sexual identity, or birth relations.
- The structural barriers to political participation are removed, creating electoral processes uncorrupted by the power of private wealth and ensuring access to government decision-making at all levels for all people.
- The social safety net is rewoven, its strongest cords a generosity of spirit toward the vicissitudes of the human condition and a recognition that no one deserves to live in desperation.
- The outlandish apportionment of public funds to militarism is diverted to address the climate and energy crises, rebuild neglected infrastructure, and meet human needs.
- We respect and celebrate the rich diversity of belief, language, and cultural practice that constitutes the national fabric.

To flesh out these ideas, ARC commissioned leading thinkers and activists to develop a set of Issue Essays. The essays provided proactive proposals that addressed racial equity in key issues areas including public education, health care, the economy, immigration reform, criminal justice, civil rights, green economies and biotechnology. ARC also reviewed the Bush Administration’s record on race to highlight additional areas needing attention and action.

1. Applied Research Center, Compact for Racial Justice: An Agenda for Fairness and Unity, November 2008. www.arc.org/compact



The full Compact includes a series of visionary and viable proposals for combating structural racism—the systemwide patterns of racial discrimination, disparities and divisions that dominate our society. The Compact calls for an ambitious societal commitment and undertaking to ensure that our political, economic, social and legal systems guarantee full equity, inclusion and dignity for all people.

In addition to an array of specific policy proposals, both short- and long-term, the Compact includes two overarching demands. First, it calls for the federal government to re-dedicate itself to the principle that all people are created equal and therefore are entitled to fair treatment, equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination. The federal government must set the standard for making these ideals a reality by committing to strong dedicated leadership, full funding and aggressive enforcement. A pivotal starting point is with the Department of Justice, especially the Civil Rights Division, as well as the Offices for Civil Rights in the other departments of U.S. government, which are already charged with the mission of ensuring institutional equity. State and local governments, including law enforcement agencies at all levels, should follow the lead of the federal government by making racial equity and the elimination of racial disparities a top priority, reflected in all institutional policies, programs and practices.

The second demand would establish the development and use of Racial Impact Statements. Modeled after environmental and fiscal impact statements, Racial Impact Statements can help ensure that racial and ethnic equity gets full consideration during the policymaking process so that patterns of inequality and exclusion can be prevented and eliminated. By proactively assessing and anticipating possible inequities when bills are being considered, legislatures and administrators can avoid unintentional bias and expanded disparities. Racial Impact Statements can be adopted and used at all levels of government.

In November 2008, two weeks after the presidential election, ARC assembled nearly 1000 racial justice leaders and activists from across the country at the Facing Race Conference, held in Oakland, California. The Compact for Racial Justice was unveiled in a conference plenary, where authors of the issue essays presented pro-

posals and participants were provided an opportunity to discuss and endorse the Compact principles.

The Compact helped activists fix their gaze on both short and long-term goals, becoming a vehicle for projecting a vision for a society that “rejects the pessimism of unending racial conflict and embraces the optimism of a human community firmly anchored in justice and mutuality.” While the incoming Obama Administration’s transition team was assembling their leadership team and initial policy initiatives, ARC continued to contact people across the country to explore opportunities to connect constituencies and link support for different issues and actions.

During the first 100 days of the Obama Administration, ARC held bi-weekly national conference calls, each featuring national experts from a variety of organizations focused on a different issues area. The calls engaged two thousand activists from hundreds of organizations who shared ideas and strategies to advance immigration rights, green jobs, the Employee Free Choice Act, health care access and other major policy issues now fully at play with the new Congress and Administration.

The Compact for Racial Justice will continue to be used as a vehicle for seeding and sharing ideas, fostering connections, and coordinating strategies. At its best, it can also continue to serve as a living document that offers valuable principles, viable proposals and a bold vision that can inform and inspire the continuing work of moving racial justice forward.

The Compact’s Preamble concludes with the following lines:

At this, OUR moment of destiny, let us acknowledge with great gratitude that we build on the legacy of those who, down through the centuries, made our progress possible. May what they dreamed be ours to do. We are rich in resources, in the very first place the deep creativity, intelligence, and perseverance of communities who hunger for freedom. And so we, steadfast travelers on the long roadway to racial justice, are secure in the knowledge that our destination will be reached. We’ve come this far not just by faith, not just by leaning on what we hold sacred, but by the daily decision of each and every one of us not to turn around. We will never give up, we will never give in; we will find a way or make one, together.²

2. Ibid.



Discussion Questions and Areas for Further Research

The Compact for Racial Justice: An Agenda for Fairness and Unity | By Rinku Sen, Tammy Johnson and Terry Keleher

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What's the difference between structural racism and personal prejudice?
2. Why does the Compact emphasize racial impacts over intentions?
3. How is the concept of “diversity” different from “equity?”
4. What are the implications of being “colorblind” or race-silent as opposed to consciously and explicitly addressing racial inequities?
5. What is your assessment of the utility of promoting the Compact for Racial Justice in conjunction with the election of a Black president?

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Definition and dynamics of structural racism
2. Racial Impact Statements (also known as Racial Equity Impact Assessments)
3. Enforcement actions and activity by the Civil Rights division of the US Department of Justice and the Office of Civil Rights