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BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

December 11 , 2008 - Issue 303

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**"How Obama Won"
Along the Color Line
By Dr. Manning Marable, PhD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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["Along The Color Line", written by Manning Marable, PhD and distributed by BlackCommentator.com, is a public educational and information service dedicated to fostering political dialogue and discussion, inspired by the great tradition for political event columns written by W. E. B. Du Bois nearly a century ago. Re-prints are permitted by any Black-owned or Black-oriented publications (print or electronic) without charge as long as they are printed in their entirety including this paragraph and, for electronic media, a link to <http://www.BlackCommentator.com>.]

An essential part of Barack Obama's presidential victory was the defection of key groups who had previously supported George W. Bush four years earlier.

According to the Pew Center for The People and The Press, in 2004 one-third of all registered voters (33 percent) identified themselves with the Republican Party, compared to 35 percent of registered voters favoring Democrats, and 32 percent claiming to be independents. In 2004, Republicans trailed Democrats in their support from 18 to 29 year olds, but only by four percent (29 vs. 33 percent). Republicans won pluralities over Democrats among all white registered voters (38 vs. 30 percent), voters with BA and BS degrees (38 vs. 30 percent), voters earning more than \$75,000 annually (40 vs. 29 percent), white Southerners (43 vs. 28 percent), white Protestant voters (44 vs. 27 percent), and a clear majority among white evangelical Christian voters (53 vs. 22 percent).

Four years later, just prior to the Democratic National Convention, the Pew Center conducted a similar national survey of registered voters and found major gains made by the Democrats in some voter identifications. One major shift occurred among youth voters age 18-29, who favored Democrats over Republicans (37 vs. 23 percent), with another 40 percent identifying themselves as independents. Republican-support in

union households fell slightly, from 26 percent in 2004 to only 20 percent in 2008. Hispanics, who in 2004 had favored Democrats over Republicans, but only by a 44 vs. 23 percent margin, had become more partisanly Democratic (48 vs. 19 percent). But what was perhaps most striking was the growing defection of the intelligentsia and educated class from the Republicans. The 2008 Pew survey indicated that registered college graduates, who vote generally at rates above 80 percent, favored Democrats over Republicans (34 vs. 29 percent). For registered voters with post-graduate and professional degrees the partisan bias towards Democrats was even wider (38 vs. 26 percent, with 36 percent independents).

The 2008 Pew survey also makes clear that the United States, in terms of its political culture and civic ideology, had become a "center-left nation," rather than a "right-center nation," as it had been under Ronald Reagan. Sixty-seven percent of registered voters surveyed about their views on affirmative action, favored such policies that had been "designed to help blacks, women, and other minorities get better jobs and education." Sixty-one percent agreed that the U.S. government should guarantee "health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes." A majority of registered voters believe that abortion should either be "legal in all cases" (18 percent), or "legal in most cases" (38 percent). Over 70 percent of those surveyed believe "global warming" is either a "very serious" or "somewhat serious problem." And over 80 percent favored "increasing federal funding for research on wind, solar and hydrogen technology." This was a rationale for long-overdue governmental action, not *laissez faire* and the Reaganite mantra of "government-is-the-problem."

On nearly every college campus by the early fall, it became overwhelmingly clear that Obama had won the enthusiastic support of both students and faculty. In a comprehensive national survey of over 43,000 undergraduates conducted by CBS News and the Chronicle of Higher Education in October, 2008, the Obama-Biden ticket received 64 percent vs. 32 percent for McCain-Palin. When asked to describe their "feelings about your candidate," 55 percent of the Obama-backers "enthusiastically" supported him, compared to only 30 percent of McCain's supporters. By significant margins, college students described Obama as "someone you can relate to" (64 percent), would "bring about real change in Washington" (70 percent), and "cares about the needs and problems of people like yourself" (78 percent).

Although nearly one-half (48 percent) of all students surveyed had never voted in a presidential election, a significant percentage of them had become involved in one of the national campaigns primarily through the internet. Twenty-three percent surveyed had "signed-up" to be a candidate's fan on a social networking site;" 28 percent had "visited a candidate's Facebook or MySpace page;" 65 percent had browsed a candidate's official website; and 68 percent had seen a video of their favorite presidential candidate on "YouTube." Small numbers had participated in more traditional ways. Thirteen percent had volunteered to help their candidate by canvassing or by doing voter registration. Nearly one fourth had personally attended a rally featuring their candidate, with another 31 percent recruiting friends to join their campaign.

It was the conservative British newsmagazine, The Economist, that identified the critical "brain gap" that contributed to McCain's electoral downfall. "Barack Obama won college graduates by two points, a group George Bush won by six points four years ago. He won voters with postgraduate degrees by 18 points." The Economist noted that Obama even carried by six points households above \$200,000 annually. McCain's core constituency, by contrast, was "among uneducated voters in Appalachia and the South." To The Economist, "the Republicans lost the battle of ideas even more

comprehensively than they lost the battle for educated votes, marching into the election armed with nothing more than slogans."


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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Manning Marable, PhD is one of America's most influential and widely read scholars. Since 1993, Dr. Marable has been Professor of Public Affairs, Political Science, History and African-American Studies at [Columbia University](#) in New York City. For ten years, Dr. Marable was founding director of the [Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University](#), from 1993 to 2003. Dr. Marable is an author or editor of over 20 books, including [Living Black History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future](#) (2006); [The Autobiography of Medgar Evers: A Hero's Life And Legacy Revealed Through His Writings, Letters, And Speeches](#) (2005); [Freedom: A Photographic History of the African American Struggle](#) (2002); [Black Leadership: Four Great American Leaders and the Struggle for Civil Rights](#) (1998); [Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics](#) (1995); and [How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society \(South End Press Classics Series\)](#) v:shapes="_x0000_i1030"> (1983). His current project is a major biography of Malcolm X, entitled *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, to be published by Viking Press in 2009. [Click here](#) to contact Dr. Marable or visit his Website [manningmarable.net](#).

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