

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

**October 9 , 2008 - Issue 294**

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here

[Home](#)

**Cover Story**  
**Obama's Electoral Path to The White House (Part I)**  
**By Dr. Martin Kilson, PhD**  
**BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

**INTRODUCTORY**

It was in January 2007 that first-term United States Senator Barack Obama officially entered the campaign for the Democratic Party presidential nomination. Twelve-months later Senator Obama, 46 years old, gained victory in the Iowa Caucus primary on January 3, 2008—Obama 38%, Edwards 33%, Clinton 29%. Obama's Iowa victory warranted the following headline in the *New York Times* (January 4, 2008): "New Face And A Call For Change Shake Up The Democratic Field."

Recall for a minute just how politically stunning Senator Barack Obama's victory in the Iowa Caucus primary was. Obama's campaign demonstrated that an African-American candidate for a major political party's presidential nomination could emerge victorious in a primary where the state's voters are 95%-plus White Americans, besting two major White candidates of high prominence. This is my ninth article for *Black Commentator.com* on the Obama campaign.

When writing my first article for the January 17, 2008 issue of *Black Commentator*, I had a fervent feeling about the Obama campaign's political-culture roots, so to speak, and I thought it useful to inform *Black Commentator's* readers of this. The Obama campaign's political-culture roots were, for me, clear and unambiguous. *Namely, the Obama campaign stood-on-the-shoulders-of-Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 campaign quests, which were undertaken, of course, at a less politically propitious point in time.*

Jackson's campaign-quests occurred in an era during the consolidation of a systemically reactionary Republican oligarchic-plutocratic conservatism. A conservatism which—after two Reagan administrations and a Bush I administration and two Bush II administrations—has literally ravaged social-equalitarian patterns and opportunities in American life. In my *Black Commentator* (January 17, 2008) article, I formulated the

crucial historic linkage between Jesse Jackson's primary campaign innovations and the 2008 Obama campaign as follows:

There's no doubt that Obama's current 2008 quest for the Democratic presidential nomination is a unique electoral phenomenon, paving a way to new political possibilities in our country's oligarchic and plutocratic politics. But Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 campaign-quests also represented a unique Black American-connected electoral thrust, though at a lower level of systemic political impact than Obama's campaign.

Above all, Jackson's campaign-quests –beyond any previous electoral undertaking by Black political personalities—afforded African-Americans a preliminary sense that their ethnic-bloc political culture and its leadership personalities contained attributes of national-level political capability.

The long presidential-primary road from Jesse Jackson to Barack Obama was, as it were, dirt-and-gravel in composition. The Barack Obama presidential-primary road is a bona fide modern turnpike, and on this modern presidential-primary turnpike a Black politician of exemplary caliber and capabilities is now traveling en route to the White House. Can he arrive there victoriously?

I am writing this article during the last week in September— just five weeks before the November 4th election— and I am inclined toward an affirmative answer to the above-mentioned question. This inclination is influenced by what I call “electoral building-blocks” that produced the victory path for the Obama campaign during the long primary contests. Two crucial “electoral building-blocks” for the Obama campaign during the primary contests were the following: 1) Mobilizing a “Liberal White Voter Bloc”. 2) Mobilizing a “Maximal Black Voter Bloc”. *If these two core “electoral building-blocks” can be put in place between the end of the Democratic Nominating Convention and November 4th, the Obama campaign will win the office of the president of the United States.*

### **ROUTE TO AN OBAMA VICTORY: MOBILIZING LIBERAL WHITE VOTERS**

There are good grounds for being hopeful regarding the Obama campaign's chances of mobilizing just enough “Liberal White Voters” into one of that campaign's crucial “electoral building-blocks” for victory in November. These grounds were pointed out by the Pew Research Center's polling director, Andrew Kohut, in an Op. Ed. article that appeared several days after the New Hampshire primary election in the *New York Times* (January 10, 2008). According to Kohut, although Barack Obama lost the New Hampshire primary by 3 percentage points, there was a certain kind of victory-in-defeat, as it were, in the way that the votes of White voters “divided along socio-economic lines.” Among White voters in New Hampshire, Kohut reported the following:

Mrs. Clinton beat Mr. Obama by 12 points (47 percent to 35 percent) among those [White voters] with family incomes below \$50,000. By contrast, Mr. Obama beat Mrs. Clinton by five points (40 percent to 35 percent) among those earning more than \$50,000. There was an education gap, too. College graduates voted for Mr. Obama 39 percent to 34 percent; Mrs. Clinton won among those who never attended college, 43 percent to 35 percent.

Put another way, what the director of polling for the Pew Research Center is telling us is that in the New Hampshire primary, what I dub the “Liberal White Voter Bloc”—solid middle-class and upper middle-class White voters—favored Barack Obama over Hillary

Clinton, while lower middle-class and working-class White voters favored Clinton over Obama. Furthermore, Andrew Kohut's *New York Times* article also informs us that underlying a "Liberal White Voter Bloc" support for Obama in the New Hampshire primary was not just an income dynamic but also an education dynamic among White voters, because the "Liberal White Voter Bloc" was equally defined by college-educated voters.

When Andrew Kohut identified in his *New York Times* article the role of a "Liberal White Voter Bloc" that supported Obama over Clinton in the New Hampshire January primary, *he was also identifying what eventually became a crucial "electoral building-block" for the road to victory for Senator Obama by the end of the Democratic presidential primaries in July 2008.* Now we must ask what are the constituent middle-class and upper middle-class White voter-bloc units that make up what I dub the "Liberal White Voter Bloc"?

These constituent White voter-bloc units are the following: 1) Middle-class/Upper middle-class persons in 18-40 Age Group; 2) Middle-class/Upper-middle-class persons in the 40-60 Age Group; 3) White ideological-independents; 4) White ideological-moderates; and 5) White women in the 45-under Age Group. This list of constituent White voter-bloc units who at this time juncture (September 20th, 2008) make up what I dub a "Liberal White Voter Bloc" is portrayed in TABLE I.

**TABLE I**  
**LIST OF WHITE VOTER-BLOC UNITS THAT SUPPORT OBAMA OVER McCAIN**  
**(SEPTEMBER 18, 2008)**

WHITE VOTER-BLOC UNITS	BARACK OBAMA	JOHN McCAIN
Middle-Class 18-40 Age Group	55%	39%
Middle-Class 40-60 Age Group	47%	44%
White Women 45-Under Age Group	54%	40%
White Ideological-Independents	48%	41%
White Ideological-Moderates	56%	33%

**SOURCE: NEWYORK TIMES/CBS NEWS POLL (September 12-16). Published in *New York Times* (September 18, 2008).**

In aggregate terms, the potential Obama-supporting "Liberal White Voter Bloc" constitutes between 35% and 40% of the White electorate nationwide. If the Obama presidential campaign can mobilize behind Obama most of these White voters, combined with a majority vote among White independents/moderates and strong majorities among African-American and Hispanic voters, Senator Obama will win in November.

We should note, however, that ensuring a viable mobilization of a "Liberal White Voter Bloc" in support of Senator Obama in the November election will involve surmounting some real obstacles. Basic among those obstacles is the simple fact that many White American citizens are not ready to undergo an important development in the character of what might be called "their American identity". *They are not ready to "multiculturalize their American identity". Which is to say, they aren't ready to graft-an-African-American-cultural-ingredient on to their White American identity, especially in regard to political attitudes and voting preferences favorable to an African-American as president of the United States.*

In the concluding section of this article, I will discuss more fully the problem— here in the early 21st century—of getting a majority quantum of White American voters to "multiculturalize their American identity", to close-the-curtain-on-racism, that is.

Meanwhile, the data shown in TABLE II provide us a glimpse of what might be called the "attitudinal obstacles" that confront the Obama campaign's endeavor to obtain a maximal mobilization of a "Liberal White Voter Bloc" in support of Senator Obama in November.

**TABLE II**  
**LIST OF WHITE VOTER-BLOC UNITS THAT SUPPORT McCain OVER Obama**  
**(SEPTEMBER 18, 2008)**

WHITE VOTER-BLOC UNITS	Barack Obama	JOHN McCain
ALL WHITE VOTERS	38 %	55 %
White Women Over 45 Age Group	42 %	49 %
White Men	36 %	53 %
White Catholics	36 %	59 %
Jewish Voters (New York State)*	32 %	54 %

SOURCE: ABC NEWS/WASHINGTON POST POLL (September 8, 2008).

Data on "White Women" and "White Men" from NEW YORK TIMES/CBS NEWS POLL (September 12-16, 2008).

\*SIENA RESEARCH INSTITUTE POLL. Published in *New York Post* (September 16, 2008).

One curious set of figures in TABLE II sort of stand out in regard to the issue of what I call "attitudinal obstacles" among White voters that confront the Obama campaign's goal of a viable mobilization of a "Liberal White Voter Bloc". Namely, that as of a September 15th *Siena Research Institute Poll* published in the *New York Post* (September 16, 2008), only 32% of the Jewish Voter Bloc in New York state support the Obama campaign, while 54% favor John McCain.

This anti-Obama preference pattern among the Jewish Voter Bloc in New York is clearly counterintuitive. Why do I say this? Because the Jewish Voter Bloc is reputed to be more liberal toward the civil rights activism African-American leadership pattern. *Which is to say, toward the mainstream African-American leadership pattern as represented by politically effective activist African-American organizations like the NAACP, National Urban League, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, National Bar Association, Rainbow Coalition, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, National Council of Negro Women, Children's Defense Fund, etc.* Therefore, insofar as Senator Barack Obama's political career has been associated with the mainstream African-American leadership pattern, *one might have thought that the Jewish Voter Bloc in the Democratic Party-leaning state of New York would welcome an opportunity to vote for a high-caliber African-American candidate like Obama.*

What a depressing thought that the Jewish Voter Bloc in New York would turn-its-back on a top-flight African-American presidential candidate like Senator Barack Obama! Indeed, I consider the current poll data showing 54% of New York state Jewish voters favoring McCain's rightwing Republican campaign rather hard to believe. However, being an optimist among progressive African-American intellectuals, I also suspect that during the final six weeks of the presidential campaign a majority of New York Jewish voters will retrieve their liberal values and support Obama.

No doubt as every American college student probably knows, the process of grafting-an-African-American-cultural-ingredient on to White Americans' cultural identities *has been a slow uphill Sisyphean-type endeavor since the end of the Civil War in 1865.* The nasty tenacity of features of the racist ethos among far too many of our White compatriots has been depressing, and challenging this racist ethos must therefore remain a persistent goal of liberal and progressive forces in American life.

Of course, this goal of pressuring the racist ethos into *a multicultural and cosmopolitan Americanist identity* has been a center piece of the African-American civil rights activist leadership tradition (the tradition of the NAACP, the National Urban League, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, etc.), and it was within the legacy of this African-American leadership tradition that Senator Barack Obama evolved as a major American politician. Fortunately for American politics here in the first decade of the 21st century, *the full-fledged social movement dynamics that shaped and defined the Obama campaign throughout the 2008 Democratic primaries, have helped to reduce the negative impact of America's racial legacy in today's presidential contest.* Accordingly, I believe it is a realistic goal for the Obama campaign to seek a viable electoral mobilization of a "Liberal White Voter Bloc" for the November election.

**NOTE ON COUNTERVAILING WHITE DYNAMICS: (I) WHITE WOMEN VOTERS**

Be that as it may, attention must be given to what might be dubbed two potential "countervailing White socio-cultural dynamics" among today's White voters. I label these dynamics as "countervailing" because, if they are operating at a "hyper-level" rather than "moderate-level", *they could derail the Obama campaign's goal of a viable electoral mobilization of a "Liberal White Voter Bloc".*

The two potential "countervailing White socio-cultural dynamics" I have in mind are the following. One is a rather long-standing tradition among White women voters of favoring Republican Party presidential candidates over Democratic Party presidential candidates. The second is the persistence of what I call "racist predilections" among about one-third of White Americans—*racist predilections that might be stirred to consciousness and thus influence the votes of a critical minority segment of White voters in November.*

Whereas liberal Democratic presidential candidates during the 1960s gained a majority of White women voters—namely, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Hubert Humphrey—subsequent liberal Democratic presidential candidates between 1972 to 1992 failed to gain a majority of White women voters. The data shown in TABLE III relate this pattern. The young, charismatic, Southern liberal Democratic candidate Bill Clinton, former governor of Arkansas, interrupted the Republican pattern when he won a majority of White women voters in 1992 and repeated this achievement in 1996. *However, the two subsequent presidential elections saw White women returning to the tradition of favoring the Republican presidential candidate—George W. Bush.*

TABLE III  
HOW WHITE WOMEN VOTED IN NINE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS  
1972-2004  
(Support Went To Listed Candidate)

ELECTION YEAR	REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE	DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE
1972	Richard Nixon	---
1976	Gerald Ford	---
1980	Ronald Reagan	---
1984	Ronald Reagan	---
1988	George H. W. Bush	---
1992	---	Bill Clinton
1996	---	Bill Clinton
2000	George W. Bush	---
2004	George W. Bush	---

SOURCE: *New York Times* (September 15, 2008).

The situation regarding the interface of White women voters with Democratic Party and

Republican Party presidential candidates during the 2008 election season is revealed by data in TABLE IV.

**TABLE IV**  
**WHITE WOMEN'S PREFERENCE BETWEEN OBAMA & McCAIN**  
**JUNE-SEPTEMBER 2008**

POLL MONTH	BARACK OBAMA	JOHN <u>McCAIN</u>	DIFFERENCE
JUNE 15, 2008	39 %	55 %	-16
JULY 23, 2008	48 %	49 %	-1
AUG. 22, 2008	50 %	43 %	+7
SEPT. 7, 2008	43 %	54 %	-11
SEPT. 22, 2008	49 %	47 %	+2
SOURCE: ABC NEWSWASHINGTON POST POLL (September 24, 2008).			

There's only one good word to describe what might be called the "electoral demeanor" of White women voters during the 2008 election season toward the Obama-McCain candidacies for president of the United States. That word is "mercurial".

As shown in TABLE IV, poll results produced by *ABC News/Washington Post Poll* show sizable fluctuations in White women's preferences as between Obama-McCain. From a 16-point advantage for McCain in June 2008; to a much smaller 7-point advantage for Obama by late August 2008 (three days before the start of the Democratic Convention); swinging back to a sizable 11-point advantage for McCain by early September 2008 (just after the end of the Republican Convention); and at the start of the last week in September there was a shift toward Obama, a small 2-point advantage--49% Obama to 47% McCain.

Clearly, the "electoral demeanor" of White women voters toward the Obama-McCain candidacies has been a mercurial one. As the analyst for the *ABC News/Washington Post Poll* (September 24, 2008) put it:

Then there are white women. They've been a changeable group this year, shifting, for example, from +7 Obama to +11 McCain from late August (before the conventions) to early September. They're back to a dead heat now [Sept. 24], precisely where they were in mid-July. But the fact that they've backed McCain by as much as a 16-point margin (in June) keeps them a group to watch.

It should be noted, however, that, as the 2008 presidential campaign enters its final five weeks, there are a variety of forces at work in the ranks of White women voters that I believe will tilt a solid majority of these voters toward Senator Obama in the November election. One crucial force that's been operative since the end of the Democratic Convention on August 28th is the powerful political personality of Senator Hillary Clinton. There's little doubt, of course, that Senator Clinton and her inner-circle of loyalist women supporters found it emotionally wrenching to lose the nomination to Senator Barack Obama. At the same time, however, *forces representing political commonsense and political pragmatism have prevailed at the top leadership level of the Democratic Party since the vibrant-and-mature Democratic Convention in Denver.*

On the one hand, one such force was the sincere and pragmatic Democratic Party-unifying-outreach-to-Clinton (and her loyalist supporters) by Obama and his campaign mechanism. On the other hand, a second such force was an intellectually and

politically mature Democratic Party-unity orientation fashioned by Senator Hillary Clinton during the Democratic Convention in Denver – as epitomized in Clinton's astute and brilliant address to the Convention—and put into action afterward through extensive campaigning in behalf of Obama's candidacy. As I remarked above, when push-comes-to-shove on November 4th, a solid majority of White women voters will support Senator Obama.

### **NOTE ON COUNTERVAILING WHITE DYNAMICS: (II) RACIST PREDILECTIONS**

There are, I suggest, two main types of what I dub “racist predilections” (that i., racist feelings, orientations, suspicions, etc.) on the part of White Americans toward African-Americans and also toward Latino-Americans. One type might be called “implicit racist predilections”, and the second type might be called “demonstrative racist predilections”. As the Obama campaign for the presidency enters the final 5 weeks, its goal will be to minimize the electoral impact of White voters' “racist predilections”. Which is to say, the Obama campaign will be seeking over the next 5 weeks *to reduce the capacity of “racist predilections” to derail the Obama campaign's goal of a viable electoral mobilization of a “Liberal White Voter Bloc”*.

An example of what I dub “implicit racist predilections” among White Americans can be seen in poll data produced by a *USA Today/ABC News/Columbia University Poll* (September 11-14, 2008) and published in *USA Today* (September 23, 2008). One of the questions asked of 1,941 adults was as follows: “Have Blacks achieved racial equality?”

What the poll discovered gibes with responses to the same question in numerous other polls over the past decade. Namely, that while only a small proportion of African-American poll participants respond “yes” to this question, three times or more White respondents say “yes”. In the *USA Today/ABC News/Columbia University Poll*, this is precisely what occurred. Some 11% of the African-American respondents said “yes”, while nearly two-fifth of the White respondents (39%) said “yes”.

Now it is this “yes” response by nearly two-fifth of White respondents that might be labeled an “implicit racist predilection”. By which label I mean, those White respondents either hesitate or refuse to admit that the racial-caste legacy (the racist pariahization-oppression-marginalization of Black people) from, say, the end of the Civil War into the 1960s significantly restricted access to equality-of-status/opportunity for most African-Americans. The Voting Rights Act was not enacted until 1965, for example.

Even so, it is a sign of notable progress in White attitudes toward our society's racial-caste legacy that today some 60% of adult White Americans admit, in polls like the *USA Today/ABC News/Columbia University Poll*, that there are still restrictions upon the realization of equality by African-American citizens. By such admission, some 60% of Whites are saying that *it is not true that “Blacks have achieved racial equality”*; and they are also saying that public policy and private policy practices might be required to bring about this result.

Now in regard to what I dub “demonstrative racist predilections”, only a few polls have been successful at uncovering solid data on this. Occasionally, however, a major poll does so, and this has occurred recently by an *AP[Associated Press]-Yahoo News Poll* (August 17-September 5, 2008). A full-some report on this very important poll appeared in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

(September 21, 2008). In an overall summary of the AP-Yahoo News Poll, Associated

Press reporters Ron Fournier and Trevor Thompson observed as follows:

According to an AP-Yahoo News Poll in which one-third of white Democratic respondents [a total of 2,227 polled] said they harbored negative views toward black people—many calling them 'lazy', 'violent' or responsible for their own troubles. ...Given a choice of several positive and negative adjectives that might describe blacks, 20 percent of all whites in the poll said the word 'violent' strongly applied. Among other words, 22 percent agreed with 'boastful', 29 percent 'complaining', 13 percent 'lazy', and 11 percent 'irresponsible'. ...The poll sought to measure latent prejudices among whites by asking about factors contributing to the state of black America. One finding: More than a quarter of white Democrats said they agreed that 'if blacks would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites.' (See *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 21, 2008. p. A15)

What is important about the foregoing evidence of “demonstrative racist predilections” among something between one-fifth and one-third of White Democratic Party identified adults is this. Namely, that their existence among potential Democratic voters complicates the quest by the Obama campaign to fashion what I call a viable mobilization of “Liberal White Voters”.

*The existence of such potential Democratic voters who harbor “demonstrative racist predilections” might function as a countervailing obstacle to this crucial goal of the Obama campaign.*

The Associated Press reporters Ron Fournier and Trevor Thompson make this point in quite explicit terms in their article on the *AP-Yahoo News Poll* for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*:

The online poll, conducted with Stanford University, suggests that the percentage of voters who may turn away from Obama because of his race could easily be larger than the final difference between the candidates in 2004—about 2.5 percentage points. Absent racial prejudice, Obama would receive as much as 6 percentage points more support, according to statistical models in the poll.

Interestingly enough, the very latest poll by a major polling organization—*ABC News/Washington Post Poll* (September 24, 2008)—tested the issue that I call “demonstrative racist predilections”. Happily for the Obama campaign as it enters the closing five weeks of the presidential campaign, the most recent *ABC News/Washington Post Poll* has good news to report. Namely: “Far fewer [Whites]—16 percent, a new low—say race is an important issue, and that view does not meaningfully impact vote preferences.”

### **NOTE ON COUNTERVAILING WHITE DYNAMICS: (III) REFORMING RACIST PREDILECTIONS**

Furthermore, quite good news in regard to reducing the negative impact of “demonstrative racist predilections” among White voters on the Obama campaign's goal of mobilizing a viable “Liberal White Voter Bloc”, was reported in an interesting article in the *Philadelphia Daily News*

(September 22, 2008). The article was a case-study of endeavors, during September onward, to reform feelings and attitudes that amount to “demonstrative racist predilections” among working-class and middle-class White voters in Philadelphia.



These endeavors have been initiated by liberal White trade union leaders—AFL-CIO leaders—and by liberal White election ward leaders in the city of Philadelphia.

Authored by Dave Davies—a reporter for the *Philadelphia Daily News*--his article provides keen insights regarding the task of rolling-back racist predilections among White voters that Obama's candidacy stirs up. From an interview with the president of the Philadelphia AFL-CIO union, one Pat Elding, the reporter Dave Davies gained this response. "I'm hearing a lot of people saying, 'He's too young, he's too inexperienced', said Philadelphia AFL-CIO president Pat Elding. "What they're really saying is 'He's black'".

The AFL-CIO official told the reporter Dave Davies that whenever he encounters these racist predilections he stands-his-ground, so to speak, or as Davies puts it: "AFL-CIO leader Elding said that he raises the issue directly whenever he can." Here's how Pat Elding himself relates his endeavors to challenge racist predilections among White workers in Philadelphia:

When I'm talking in a union meeting, the first issue I put out is 'In case you haven't noticed, Barack Obama is black'.... Then I say, 'Now let's talk about your issues, your lives, your kids. Close your eyes and listen to what's being said in this campaign.' Davies, the reporter, proceeds to inform us that "Elding said that he urges other labor leaders to have such conversations". We need to do this one-on-one, not in rallies, not with megaphones.... I tell them they need to go to their [union] members directly, let them hear about this from experienced people who know the issues.

The remainder of the *Philadelphia Daily News* case-study article by Dave Davies discusses the application of the AFL-CIO president's strategy among the leaders of Democratic Party election wards in Philadelphia. Davies informs us that "Several Democratic ward leaders said that they're committed to convincing voters that Obama is on their side." He continues thus:

Marge Tartaglione, veteran leader of the 62nd Ward in the Northeast [a White enclave] said that she'll bring her ward in for Obama. 'If I say this person is good, they'll go for him.'

Then Davies discusses the case of another Democratic Party election ward leader, one Alan Butkovitz. "City Controller Alan Butkovitz, Democratic leader of the 54th Ward, said that he's optimistic that he and others can deal with the issue of race."

It's not the kind of full-bore racism you saw years ago.... It's become more nuanced, more complex. I don't think people feel entitled not to vote for someone because they're black. So they may say he grew up in Hawaii, or he's an elitist. And once you get it in those terms, you can deal with it.

Interestingly enough, the *New York Times* (September 28, 2008) published a similar case-study article on efforts in Wisconsin by national trade unions to reform what I call "demonstrative racist predilections" among working-class and middle-class White voters. Titled "Union Leaders Confronted By Resistance To Obama", the author—Steven Greenhouse—characterized the Wisconsin situation as follows:

...Mr. Obama's race has complicated labor's efforts. When canvassers knock on doors, some voters do not acknowledge race explicitly, said [Anthony] Rainey, the U.A.W. Leader [president of U.A.W. Local 469]. The main reason you get is, 'I don't trust him because I don't know him'". Karen Ackerman,

political director of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., said: "We're very conscious of the fact that many voters [in Wisconsin] have never voted for an African-American for any office. For some voters, there is a reluctance." Ms. Ackerman said Mr. Obama was also new to the political scene, so people have not had time to get used to him. "We are trying to peel away what obstacles people have, union member by union member", she said.

Steven Greenhouse then informs his readers about the quite extensive electoral mobilization campaign that major trade unions are putting in place to reform as best they can the antipathy toward the Obama campaign among trade union-based working-class and middle-class White voters. As Greenhouse informs us:

The A.F.L.-C.I.O. says its nationwide campaign effort will involve knocking on 10 million doors, making 70 million phone calls, distributing 20 million leaflets and 25 million pieces of mail, and sending out more than four million e-mail messages. The nation's unions talk of spending more than \$300 million in the campaign, including \$85 million by the Service Employees International Union.

The current AFL-CIO nationwide campaign to reform both conservative-predilections and racist-predilections among working-class White voters is being executed by a variety of organizations, one of which is called Working America. Dubbed a "little-noticed group" by a case-study article titled "Labor Woos Whites For Obama" in the *Wall Street Journal* (October 7, 2008), the AFL-CIO political action organization Working America is described as follows by reporters Brody Mullins and Kris Maher: "The little-noticed group formed by the A.F.L.-C.I.O. has no role in workplaces or contract bargaining and collects no mandatory dues. *What it does is sign up members, 2.5 million so far, and persuade them to vote Democratic.*" (Emphasis Added).

Of course, in light of the tight Obama-McCain contest for the presidency here in the last month of campaigning, what is so crucial about the task facing Working America is the simple fact that, as the Wall Street Journal article observed, "working-class whites are important because they make up just about half of the electorate." So the AFL-CIO political action organization Working America shoulders the special task of overcoming working-class White voters' racist-proclivities.

To this end, the Wall Street Journal article reports that "Working America's 450 paid employees are mostly going after white, working-class voters in swing states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania", urging working-class White voters to set aside whatever racial anxieties they have. "With leaflets, phone calls and personal visits," says the Wall Street Journal article, "they urge those voters to focus on economic issues like taxes, health care and education...." Working America proceeds by recruiting volunteers who, in turn, become formal members of Working America operating as its field agents. Whereas AFL-CIO in 2004 had 800,000 Working America members, the Wall Street Journal article reported that "today there are that many in Ohio alone."

The executive director of Working America, Karen Nussbaum, characterized the thinking underlying her organization's electoral mobilization among working-class White voters this way:

[They]...need to connect to their need for economic changeable so that it's stronger than their fear of cultural [racial] change. *I think it's a challenge for a lot of white people to vote for a black candidate. They've never been asked to do it before.* (Emphasis Added).

Thus far, Karen Nussbaum's staff at Working America is succeeding beyond their expectations, as a recent survey shown in TABLE V has revealed. Whereas McCain led Obama by 18 percentage points among non-college degree White voters in a Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll in September, by October Obama lagged behind among working-class white voters by 11 percentage points. Reporters Brody Mullins and Kris Maher who authored the article "Labor Woos Whites For Obama", interpreted the data in TABLE V as follows:

Working-class whites are important because they make up just about half of the electorate. The latest Wall Street Journal/NBC poll shows *Sen. Obama has built a six-point lead over Sen. John McCain in part by cutting his deficit among these voters to 11 points*. Two weeks ago , when Sen. Obama trailed Sen. McCain by 16 points among this group, the presidential race was essentially tied, according to the WSJ/NBC poll. (Emphasis Added).

**TABLE V**  
**CANDIDATE CHOICE OF NON-COLLEGE DEGREE WHITE VOTERS**  
**SEPTEMBER -OCTOBER 2008**

POLL PERIOD AMONG WHITE VOTERS	BARACK OBAMA	JOHN McCAIN
SEPTEMBER 2008	56%	38%
OCTOBER 2008	51%	40%

**SOURCE;** WALL STREET JOURNAL/NBC NEWS POLLS. **Reported in** *Wall Street Journal* (October 7, 2008).

## **A CONCLUDING NOTE**

Let me conclude this discussion of the endeavors to surmount racist predilections among White voters. I do so by referring to fascinating historical data on racial voting patterns in mayoral elections in Philadelphia from 1983—when the first African-American mayor was elected—and 2007—when the third African-American mayor was elected, the present Mayor Michael Nutter.

As shown in TABLE VI, the first Black mayoral candidate to gain election in 1983—Wilson Goode—received only 20% White votes, and in his second election in 1987 Mayor Goode received only 18% White votes, which meant that massive support from the Black voter bloc ensured victory for Mayor Goode in his two elections. Wilson Goode was a professional accountant who had worked in the city bureaucracy, and was a moderate liberal politically, *but the political culture in Philadelphia had been so racially polarized throughout the 1970s that a Black mayoral candidate was hardly welcome among Philadelphia's White voters*. Indeed, this racial polarization was exacerbated—rendered tenacious in fact—during the two-term mayoralty of former police commissioner Frank Rizzo during the 1970s, and his autocratic arrogance and anti-Black posturing led him to seek revision of the City Constitution so as to allow him a third term, but happily that cynical maneuver failed owing to a massive mobilization of the city's African-American voters.

**TABLE VI**  
**WHITE VOTING PATTERN IN PHILADELPHIA'S MAYORAL ELECTIONS**  
**1983-2007**

PHILA. DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS	WHITE VOTES FOR BLACK CANDIDATES	WHITE VOTES FOR WHITE CANDIDATES
1983 General Election	Wilson Goode 20 %	John Egan-Tom Leonard 80 %
1987 General Election	Wilson Goode 18 %	Frank Rizzo 82 %
1999 Dem. Primary	John Street-John White-D. Evans 20 %	Marty Weinberg-H. Fernandez 80 %
2007 Dem. Primary	Michael Nutter-C. Fattah-D. Evans 36 %	Tom Knox- Robert Brady 64 %
2007 General Election	Michael Nutter 64 %	Al Taubenberg 36 %

SOURCE: Dave Davies, "Gauging The Role Of Race", *Philadelphia Daily News* (September 22, 2008).

It was not until the 2007 Democratic Primary Election (20 years after Goode's second election) that White votes for Black mayoral candidates surpassed more than 20%, reaching 4csxfs36% in fact. Eventually however, it was a politically savvy moderate-liberal African-American mayoral candidate in the 2007 General Election—Michael Nutter—who attracted a majority of Philadelphia's White voters, gaining 64% of them in fact. The White mayoral candidate who ran against Nutter—Al Taubenberg—received just 36% of the White vote.

What the foregoing tale told in TABLE VI suggests is that, given a politically savvy African-American politician who fashions a solid issue-substantive appeal to working-class and middle-class White voters in Philadelphia by the Obama campaign in this 2008 presidential race, gaining an electorally effective share of White voters (say 40%) is realizable in November. Accordingly, when what I call "an effective share of White votes in Philadelphia" in November is matched by the Obama campaign throughout the state of Pennsylvania, combined with an overwhelming support for Obama from the African-American voter-bloc, Obama will win Pennsylvania's electoral votes.

Finally let's wish success to the electoral mobilization by the AFL-CIO's organization Working America that challenges working-class White voters' racial anxieties as they relate to Senator Obama. Because combining a viable share of White working-class votes for Obama, on the one hand—which seems attainable—with a maximal Black voter-bloc support for Obama on the other hand, will ensure an Obama victory in November.

Part II will be published next week.

[Click here to comment on this article  
or see what others are saying in the](#)  
**The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog**

**BlackCommentator.com** Editorial Board member Martin Kilson, PhD hails from an African Methodist background and clergy: From a great-great grandfather who founded an African Methodist Episcopal church in Maryland in the 1840s; from a great-grandfather AME clergyman; from a Civil War veteran great-grandfather who founded an African Union Methodist Protestant church in Pennsylvania in 1885; and from an African Methodist clergyman father who pastored in an Eastern Pennsylvania mill town - Ambler, PA. He attended Lincoln University (PA), 1949-1953, and Harvard graduate

school. Appointed in 1962 as the first African-American to teach in Harvard College, in 1969 he was the first African-American tenured at Harvard. He retired in 2003 as a Frank G. Thomson Professor of Government, Emeritus. His publications include: [Political Change in a West African State: A Study of the Modernization Process in Sierra Leone](#) (Harvard University Press, 1966); [Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience](#) (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970); [New States in the Modern World \(Center for International Affairs\)](#) (Harvard University Press, 1975); [The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays](#) (Harvard University Press, 1976); The Making of Black Intellectuals: Studies on the African American Intelligentsia (Forthcoming. University of Missouri Press); and The Transformation of the African American Intelligentsia, 1900-2008 (Forthcoming). Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Kilson.

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)[Click Here](#)[Home](#)[Click Here To  
CONTRIBUTE TO !\[\]\(0aff635c4179ba9e710b00f4b01d3b20\_img.jpg\) NOW](#)[Click Here To  
CONTACT !\[\]\(830769b31eeeaca920791081939ff8ba\_img.jpg\)](#)

Your comments are always welcome.

### **e-Mail re-print notice**

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002 - 2008  
www.BlackCommentator.com  
All Rights Reserved