

# Can We Defeat the Racist Southern Strategy in 2012?

September 2012

*I wrote this essay just before the presidential election of 2012 which pitted incumbent Barack Obama against Mitt Romney. As we now know, we did defeat the Southern strategy in 2012, yet the far rightwing rapidly regrouped and not only took over the Republican Party in 2016 but won the presidency itself. The political dynamics described in this article are still useful to understanding Trumpism and building the fight against it.*

The 2012 election is a pitched battle with race at the center.

It may not be “polite” to say this, but far from an era of “post racialism”, the United States is in a period of aggravated racial conflict. Though often denied and certainly more complex than the frontal racial confrontations of the past, race is the pivot of the tit-for-tat political struggle that has gripped the country for the past twelve years and, indeed, for decades prior.

The modern era of this conflict jumped off with the white conservative backlash against the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and has been deepened by their decades-long fearful reaction to the dramatic change in the color of the U.S. that resulted from the civil rights-motivated immigration reform act of 1965.

The conflict heated to a boil when white conservatives flatly rejected the legitimacy of the “premature” victory of our first Black president in 2008. Nearly 40 percent of Republicans are so enraged they cannot even admit that Obama is a U.S. citizen. Isn’t this really another way of saying they refuse to recognize a Black man as the president? Or perhaps it is the white conservatives’ modern-day Dred Scott decision declaring Obama a Black man that has no rights that they are bound to respect?

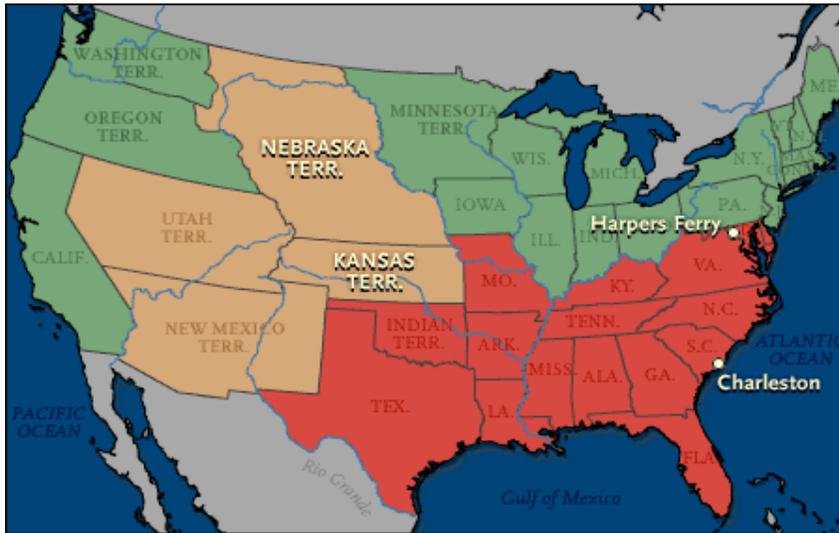
The bottom line is that we have now come to a point where voters of color are so numerous and so united behind Obama that, to be victorious, Mitt Romney must carry a higher percentage of the white vote than any modern Republican candidate has ever won. If recent trends among voters of color hold, he must carry about 63 percent of white voters. Not even Reagan won more than 61 percent.

The likelihood is that voters of color will continue to increase their percentage of the electorate by about two percent per election into the future. Political analyst Jonathan Chait concludes it is “2012 or Never” for the current bloc of white conservatives. (1) This is why they invested hugely in voter suppression legislation throughout the country (now largely but belatedly defeated by the courts). (2) This is why they have gone all out to unleash corporate money in elections.

Chait warns that the “2012 or Never” scenario for white conservatives suggests that if the Republicans win, they will be all-in for “Blowing up the welfare state and affecting the largest upward redistribution of wealth in American history.” This is the meaning of the rise of the Tea Party and the choice of Paul Ryan as Vice President.

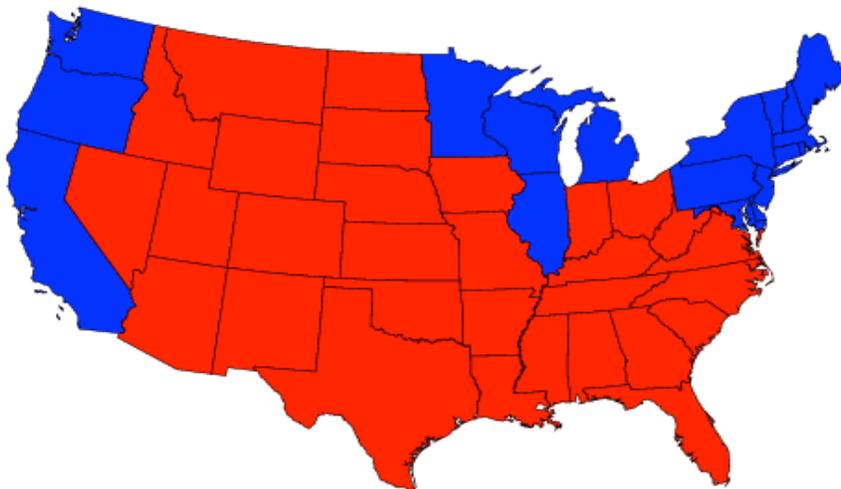
On the other hand, an Obama victory in 2012 on top of that of 2008 has the potential to mark an historic turning point U.S. politics: the defeat of the Republican’s powerful Southern Strategy by which the Republicans have dominated U.S. politics since Richard Nixon’s stunning victory in 1968. The heart of that strategy is to build a winning coalition based on racial fear and backlash in the South, the Southwest and Rocky Mountains. This strategy is rooted in slavery so it is no accident that the Electoral College map of 2004--and most other post Voting Rights maps--is a virtual replica of the pre-Civil War map of slave states and territories.

**Free and Slave Territories Before the Civil War**



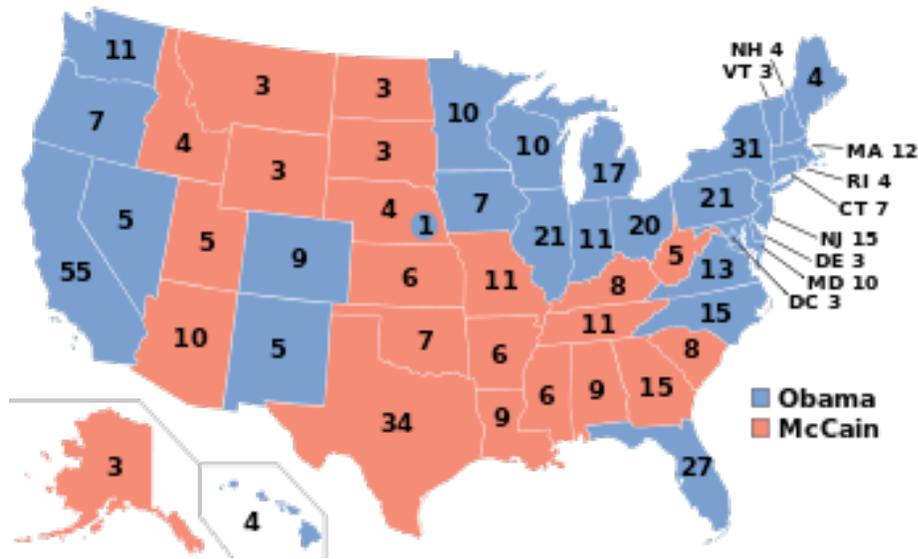
■ - FREE STATES AND TERRITORIES   
 ■ - SLAVE STATES   
 ■ - TERRITORIES OPEN TO SLAVERY

### Electoral College Map of 2004 Election



Compare these to that of 2008 when Obama defeated the Southern Strategy and carried four Southern and three Southwestern states, and took back Ohio, Iowa and Indiana.

### Electoral College Map of 2008 Election



One hundred and fifty years after abolition, the scars of slavery are fresh upon us and we are fighting the contemporary Civil War.

The defeat of the Southern Strategy could create a major turning point in U.S. politics. It could mean the end of the white rightwing led Republican majority that has prevailed since 1968. And it could herald the potential, for the first time since the 1970s, of a more progressive future for people of color and other poor and working people.

However white racial conservatives in the U.S., especially the U.S. South, have no history of giving ground without protracted and intense struggle. Their 2010 comeback was the latest example. Although 2012 might be a turning point, we can expect intense racial conflict well into the future.

### What is the Southern Strategy?

When all looked lost for the Southern segregationists after the Voting Rights Act of 1965, rightwing Republican political strategists concocted the Southern Strategy to crush the Civil Rights movement and reverse its victories. To the shock of just about everyone at the time, the seemingly dead and buried Richard Nixon rode the white backlash and the Southern Strategy to the presidency in 1968, the high point of the radical movement of the 1960s. Worse, the seemingly defeated and isolated Dixiecrats revived themselves and over the last few decades acceded to a greater political role than they had enjoyed since before the Civil War.

Since then the Strategy has been refined and updated, and brilliantly implemented, by Ronald Reagan, the Bushes and a host of Republican and rightwing political operatives like Lee Atwater, Ralph Reed and Karl Rove at all levels.

Wikipedia says the Southern Strategy “refers to the Republican Party strategy of winning elections or to gain political support in the Southern section of the country by appealing to racism against African Americans....In an interview included in a 1970 *New York Times* article, he [former Republican strategist Kevin Phillips] touched on its essence:

‘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.’

Historically, the Democratic Party was the party of Southern slaveholders that dominated the Republic from its founding until the victory of the new Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. After the Civil War the white South voted so uniformly Democratic the South was dubbed the

“Solid South.” Even when the Democratic Party transformed itself into the party of the center/left during the New Deal, the Southern segregationists were powerful enough to force the Democrats to leave Jim Crow racial discrimination and segregation intact. In return they stayed loyal to the party.

The Republicans had virtually no presence at all in the South until the Democrats began to take civil rights seriously due to the pressure of the new Freedom Movement of the late 1950s.

Like the Civil War, the Civil Rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s caused an historic realignment in U.S. politics.

Defeated, the boldest and most conservative Republican strategists concocted the Southern Strategy as the political roadmap to crush the then triumphant Democratic coalition of liberals, blacks and trade unions and return the white South to glory. It has succeeded beyond their wildest dreams.

The crux of the strategy was to whip up the white racial backlash to the Civil Rights victories and the newly powerful black movement, and on that basis to realign to the Republicans the historically Democratic white South and other white Bible Belt conservatives in the former slave and Mexican territories of the Southwest, Midwest and Rocky Mountains. By popularizing newly sanitized versions of color blind racism and Christian fundamentalism, the new Republicans hoped to trump whatever class affinities and progressive impulses working class and poor whites had with the Democrats and get them to organize and vote Republican on the basis of white racial solidarity.

It was not the moderate Rockefeller-type Republicans of the early 1960s who organized these new recruits, but an ambitious new crop of far-right ideologues. The mass migration of racial and Christian conservatives from the Democratic Party to the Republicans became the organized base of the far right. The Southern Strategy gave birth to New Rightism and the Christian Coalition, flanked by the “Right to Life,” a newly revived and politicized National Rifle Association, the suburban homeowners revolt and fiscal conservatism, not to speak of a new level of militarism. Their strength was redoubled by northern plant closures and capital flight from unions which turned the South into a dynamic demographic and economic growth center.

To be fully successful, this strategy required the leadership and funding of the majority of the corporate elite. After leaning Democratic from the New Deal to the 1960s, this elite lurched to the right when their formerly secure monopoly profit position came under intercapitalist challenge from Germany and Japan, the USSR, and the rise of the Global South led by the oil-producing countries and other former colonies starting in the 1970s. To protect their profits, they set out to lower wages, eliminate regulations, crush unions, lower taxes on themselves, starve the social safety net and move their operations to the low wage south or out of the country.

This rightward moving corporate elite financed and, until recently, was the leading force in the new Republican coalition. And it was their alliance with the grassroots racist and fundamentalist backlash that gave power to the Southern Strategy.

The other big piece of this new Republican majority coalition was recruited from the affluent suburbs created by white flight throughout the country since the 1960s. The homeowners’ tax revolt became their battle cry. Even in the South the main social base of the far-right Republican politicians is the affluent suburbs, not the stereotypical unreconstructed white small town or rural segregationists.

The post-Civil Rights Republican coalition has always been rife with factions and differences, but despite changing leaders and tactical emphases, it has held strong enough to defeat the Democrats. The Republicans have also used their newfound power to fragment and marginalize the main institutions of their opposition such as civil rights and immigrant rights groups, trade unions, reproductive rights and other feminist organizations, trial lawyers, students and journalists.

With each victory the Republican coalition became “dizzy with success” and migrated further and further to the right. The Ross Perot-led revolt of the political center in the 1990s heralded a loosening of the grip of white conservatives over the political majority and temporarily threw the presidency to Bill Clinton. Under George H.W. Bush the program of extreme trickle-down economics

and war mongering brought the country to crisis and was grist to the mill of Democratic challengers. Now they threaten Social Security, Medicare and public education.

Since 2000 the country has been rocked by tit for tat pitched political battles between this extreme rightist Republican Party and a Democratic party that finally senses victory. The Southern Strategy is in trouble.

### **The Changing Color of the Vote and the Southern Strategy**

At a deeper level the Southern Strategy is imperiled by a combination of structural/demographic changes in the electorate and political changes in voting patterns.

The structural changes are that people of color and unmarried women now occupy much larger shares of the electorate than before and continue to grow. The political factor is that the rightward lurches of the Republicans (e.g. stolen 2000 election, War on Terror starting 9/11 and 2009 Tea Party) have ignited the people of color vote. Black people in particular have mounted a real voter participation movement, and people of color are together voting Democratic in historically unprecedented numbers and percentages.

Despite the fact that George W. Bush had failed miserably on both foreign policy (Iraq) and domestic policy (the Great Recession) and run the country virtually into the ground, in 2008 whites still voted for McCain by 55 to 43. In stark contrast, blacks voted for Obama by 95 to 4, Latinos went for Obama by 66 to 32 and Asians backed Obama by 61 to 35. (3)

More importantly, people of color have surged to the polls in recent years. In 1976 they constituted just 10 percent of the vote; 24 years later, they had almost doubled to 19 percent in 2000. By 2008 the white share of the vote fell to 74 percent and that of voters of color spiked to 26 percent, a dramatic change in such a short time.

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#### **Chart of Changing Electorate and Changing Vote**

Election	2000	2008
Black %	10%	13%
Black Vote	90D-9R	95D-4R
Latino %	8%	9%
Latino Vote	62D-35R	66D-32R
Asian %	2%	2%
Asian Vote	55D-41R	62D-35R
Other Race % (4)	n/a	3%
Other Race Vote	n/a	66D-35R
White Male %	39%	36%
White Male Vote	36D-60R	41D-57R
White Female %	42%	39%
White Female Vote	48D-49R	46D-53R

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Surprisingly, the recent increase is not being driven by the burgeoning Latino or Asian populations, but by African Americans. Despite modest population growth and a horrific percentage of people barred from voting due to felony disenfranchisement laws, Blacks constituted fully thirty percent of all new voters in 2004, and another tremendous mobilization in 2008 brought them to 13 percent of the overall vote, a thirty percent increase over 2000.

This is strong evidence that Blacks continue to be the most politically progressive section of the electorate.

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 initially favored Hillary Clinton over Obama and that the pop in black voting began long before the 2008 contest.

A growing majority of African Americans live in the U.S. South. That region may be the heartland of white racial conservatives, rightwing corporate types and militarists, but it was also Jesse Jackson territory. Blacks have the greatest stake in defeating the Southern Strategy and have moved to the forefront of that struggle. Indeed, contrary to Yankee stereotypes, the region is extremely diverse and a more nuanced analysis is key to progressive strategy.

Although the sheer numbers of Latino and Asian voters have risen significantly over the same period, their percentage share of the overall vote is little changed since 2000: from eight to nine percent for Latinos and two percent each election for Asians. (The percentage of the electorate that is under thirty years of age also remained stable, at 17-18 percent.)

The Civil Rights-inspired immigration reform act of 1965 finally eliminated racial discrimination from U.S. immigration policy and opened the way for an explosion of Asian and Latino immigration.

The Latino population now outnumbers that of African Americans and continues to surge due to high birth rates and immigration. This population increase is slow to be translated into voting power, largely because so many Latinos are ineligible to vote. However, according to Sean M. Rivas, California State Field Director of Voto Latino, "Every month 50,000 Latino youth turn 18 – that's 600,000 Latino youth turning 18 every year."

Latino voters have already transformed California politics and are likely to do the same to national elections in the years to come. Traditional conservative strongholds like San Diego and Orange County, the home bases of Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon, are now blue areas. And although Latinos only slightly increased their percentage of the presidential electorate since 2000, they doubled from 1996 to 2008, from 5 to 10 percent of all voters.

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 sixteen-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.

As with the South, progressives need a more accurate picture of the rapidly changing Southwestern political and economic landscape. Still, most Latinos still live in the region despite their nationwide migration of recent decades. The fight for equality for Latinos is totally bound up with the defeat of the Southern Strategy.

According to a Pew Research Center report of June 19, 2012, "Asians recently passed Hispanics as the largest group of new immigrants to the United States." Numbering barely a million when the Asian American movement kicked off in 1968, by 2011 they were 18.2 million strong, encompassing a dazzling array of nationalities.

Asians strike a contradictory voter profile. Of all ethnicities, they have the lowest percentage of eligible voters (due to a lack of citizenship). Among eligible voters, they also have the lowest rate of voter registration. But Asian registered voters occupy the ballot in greater percentages than any other group. Also, a greater percentage of Asian voters than any other ethnic group are registered non-partisan.

The political trajectory of Asian voters has also been remarkable. In 1992, only 31 percent of Asians cast their ballot for Bill Clinton. Responding to the rightward motion of the Republicans since then, especially as regards immigration and foreign policy toward Asia, Asian Americans have migrated Democratic. This reached a highpoint in 2008 when Asians voted for Obama 62 to 35, a fourteen-point Democratic swing compared to 2004.

In the coming years millions of Asians will become eligible to vote not only in traditional strongholds like California and New York, but also Illinois, Texas and many other states. Asian political organizations and candidates are popping up all over the country, even in Georgia, to encourage, educate and leverage these new voters.

### **Unmarried Women Voters and the Gender Gap**

The highest percentage of the white vote won by any Republican presidential candidate was 61 percent. The recent high-water mark was that of George W. Bush's 58 percent in 2004. He "took" the election in 2000 when he carried 55 percent and whites were 95 percent of his total vote. McCain also won 55 percent but was swamped by Obama due to a huge increase in the people of color vote.

For decades white feminist pundits have touted the gender gap as the defining feature of U.S. politics and society. However, to be more precise, Linda Burnham has show that there is no significant gender voting difference among people of color--and the majority of white women vote Republican. (5) It is arguable that income differences are a greater voting factor than gender among whites.

However, women now constitute a small majority of the overall vote, and by race and gender, white women are the single largest voter group, 39 percent in 2008. Even a small gender gap can therefore be of great political moment.

In 2008 white men favored McCain by 57 to 41 while McCain won the white women vote by 53 to 46. This is only a four-point difference and takes place within the Republican column. The recent voting trends among white women voters are also not good. In 2004 they blundered to Bush by an additional seven points compared to 2000 and were in fact the decisive factor in his victory that year. And in 2008 they edged towards Obama by only four points, less than the swing of white men. After years of splitting down the middle, white women have tilted toward the Republicans since 2004.

Democrats and progressives must reverse this trend if they are to defeat the Southern Strategy once and for all. And there is a major new trend among women that has a unique potential to move the white women vote leftward: the rise of unmarried women voters.

Unmarried women now account for fully half of all women in the U.S. and along with Latinos are the most rapidly growing potential voter group. The group has grown due to the fact that women are marrying at an older age than before, the divorce rate is extremely high and more women than ever are remaining single for life. Exit polls do not sufficiently break down the vote to get a read on the voting patterns of unmarried white women, but in 2008 exit polls showed a seven-point Democratic differential between all single women and all married women. It is likely that a good part of that differential can be explained by race, since African American women are a disproportionate percentage of unmarried women. But recent polls show even greater Democratic leanings by unmarried women than in 2008 and indeed among women in general.

The problem is that 39 percent of unmarried women are currently not registered to vote and are significantly outvoted by more conservative married women. However, this growing group represents a major opportunity for Democrats and a major demographic/political threat to Republican electoral fortunes.

### **What Might a 2012 Victory Mean?**

A 2012 victory by Obama is far from guaranteed. A loss would mean we will have hell to pay as the Republicans will likely seize what may be their last opportunity to implement the ominous Paul Ryan program.

What might the defeat of the Southern Strategy in 2012 mean?

A full and final defeat would mean the end of the historic period of extreme white conservative leadership stemming from the remnants of slavery. However, conservative Southern whites have time and again shown a tremendous will to survive, and even if they are defeated again in 2012, they cannot be counted out as a powerful factor in U.S. politics.

Exit polls after the 2010 election indicated that forty percent of voters supported the Tea Party. This year seventy percent of Republican primary voters shunned Romney in favor of far-right candidates like Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum. Far right politicians dominate the Republican congressional delegation and have taken an “Our Way or the Highway” approach to lawmaking. Although their ability to command a national majority is in doubt, the far right is probably stronger than it has been in recent memory.

A 2012 defeat would likely cause them to lose some support from moderate corporate Republicans who are much more committed to having power than they are to the rightwing program, but other sectors are likely to continue or even redouble their support. The far right can also be counted on to lead or shape many state and local governments for decades to come.

A declining superpower like the U.S. is fertile ground for the rightwing. As I noted in “The Arab Spring and the Changing Dynamics Global Struggle,” the world is in a dangerous transition from a U.S. centered economy and politics to a more equal but unstable and uncertain future. World and national migration is changing the face of the U.S. and Europe, and the far right will continue to try to inflame and capitalize on white fear of the changing power dynamics at home and abroad. Peak oil and climate change are upon us and fights over natural resources and “natural” disasters have accelerated. Technology and conflict make terrorist attacks a daily reality. Protestants have declined from two-thirds of the population to less than half, and almost all of the losses have been among whites. (6) The far right will try to take advantage of the instability, frustration and fear that attend these changes.

Still, a 2012 victory by Obama would throw the far right onto the defensive, inflame and infect already deep divisions within the Republican Party, block the full implementation of Paul Ryan’s draconian budget and reduce the possibility of deadly wars of choice. It might also moderate the Federal bench and protect ObamaCare and maybe Social Security. Of course, Republican congressional moderates might reemerge and seduce Obama into a Faustian austerity bargain.

A victory in 2012 should open new vistas for the Democrats at the national level and in an increasing number of states and localities. The Democrats should be able to make steady gains well into the future. It would also create new opportunities for the development and maturation of an independent progressive wing within the Democratic Party.

In such a situation, agenda item number one will be to further split the far right from the center and to defeat their agenda in public opinion as well as Congress. The far right was able to strengthen itself and regain the ideological offensive in the face of the passage of historic health care reform and will retain that kind of potential. In addition, the U.S. electorate is largely fiscally conservative and moderate, including many Obama voters. Indeed, non-partisan voter registration, overwhelmingly centrist, is at an all-time high. Many moderate Democrats, probably including the Obama administration itself, will surely take this as a call to stay safely in the pro-corporate but moderate center.

There is certainly merit in some caution, but unless the Democrats take the initiative, the Republicans will continue to set the public agenda and shape public opinion. We are still vulnerable to a replay of 2010. However, the Democrats are unlikely to be bold without the emergence of a powerful national political force to the left of the Obama administration that can tussle with moderate Democrats as well as help anchor the fight with the right.

**Toward a Progressive “New Majority” of the “Rising American Electorate”**

In recent years progressives have grown more united, more organized, more aggressive and strategically smarter. We are occasionally able to gain initiative (opposition to the War in Iraq, Wisconsin, Occupy) but we have not yet become a consistent and undeniably powerful force in national politics or even within the Democratic Party, two crucial and mutually interconnected tasks. In addition, the traditional sources of progressive power—civil right organizations, trade unions, feminist groups, and liberal churches, universities, student groups and media organizations—have been greatly weakened over the decades in the face of corporate and rightwing attacks and policy changes.

Progressives have recently achieved wide agreement and increased working unity on the crucial importance of electoral politics and forging an independent progressive wing of the Democratic Party, though some on the far left still harbor abstentionist or third-party dreams. Progressives and social justice forces are experimenting with bold new strategies and initiatives. (7) MoveOn.org, Progressive Democrats of America, Rebuild the Dream, Planned Parenthood, Take Back America, Wellstone Action, the Working Families Party, many unions and social justice groups like the NAACP, Virginia New Majority, California Calls, Florida New Majority, Oakland Rising, TakeAction Minnesota, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and Maine People's Alliance are on the move with ambitious new agendas and increased unity. We are also beginning to orchestrate and coordinate our work inside and outside of the electoral and governmental arenas.

New coalition strategies are also being proposed. One of the most promising is the concept of the New Majority which has been adopted by people of color-led groups by that name in Florida, Virginia and New Mexico. I think the New Majority concept has great potential because it casts a spotlight on the need to realign new forces into a governing coalition and suggests a pivotal role for people of color, just as I have in this essay.

However, I also believe that a progressive New Majority strategy should not fall into the fatal trap of relying almost exclusively on voters of color. People of color are projected to become a majority of the U.S. population by about 2040. But they will not be a majority of voters anytime soon because so many Latinos and Asians will continue to be ineligible to vote for decades to come. For every 100 Latino residents in the United States, only 44 are eligible voters. Although people of color became the majority of the California population twelve years ago, today they still constitute only 34 percent of the electorate.

And even if or when voters of color become the majority, the divisions among them are likely to deepen. Political and social divisions along the lines of race (many Latinos are racially white) and ethnicity (including the growth of mixed race folk), economic status, ideology, age, gender and sexuality are already marked and deepening.

Consequently, the quest to win white people to a progressive coalition is crucial. White progressives are not temporary or tactical allies of people of color, they are strategic partners. Too many progressives, especially on the social justice left, white and non-white, downplay or obscure this fundamental strategic and practical necessity.

Another intriguing progressive strategic concept is the Rising American Electorate. The Rising American Electorate refers to voters of color, unmarried women and young voters. These voters are estimated to be the fastest growing part of the electorate as well as the most politically progressive. Indeed, the argument is made that they constitute more than half of the eligible electorate and that therefore they should be the main target of massive voter registration, education and mobilization efforts into the future. (8)

The usefulness of the Rising American Electorate concept is that it is specific about which sectors of the population we might focus on to build a progressive New Majority. However, I would supplement it with this: many people of color and unmarried women also make up a big part of an important and even larger group: the poor (working and non-working) and the struggling middle class.

Since 1970 the U.S. corporate elite's economic strategy has produced increasing inequality which, among other things, has split the unusually large and stable middle class of the 1950s and 1960s between the truly affluent and the struggling. It has also increased the number of poor, including

working poor. These voters largely vote Democratic, but the Republicans have intercepted a section of de-classed white working-class voters to their side and thereby cut into the former New Deal/Great Society working class coalition. Progressives can only be successful in the future if we win increasing numbers of these voters back.

This newly deindustrialized, financialized and unequal economic structure has cut deeply into union membership. But it has also energized and moved unions to the left compared to the many decades when the labor movement was dominated by the conservative building trades. The largest, most dynamic and most powerful unions are now the SEIU, AFSCME and others that represent more minority, lower paid and less stable sectors of the working class. They have adopted more progressive policies on health care, immigrant rights, organizing the unorganized and other issues that reflect this. And finally, they are starting to show signs of working with other sectors of the progressive movement in real partnerships.

Although weaker than before, it is hard to imagine a powerful progressive force to the left of Obama without a revitalized and dynamic labor movement.

Deploying a class/economic lens on the population and the society is also important from an ideological and programmatic point of view, as dramatically illustrated by the power of the 1% slogan popularized by the Occupy Movement. Even the Obama campaign has essentially adopted it. Particularly in a historical period when inequality is deepening among all people and when economic divisions are growing among people of color and women, it is crucial to weave race, class and gender together. Adding a class perspective also lessens the possibility of dividing over racial or gender identities. Indeed, in this period of great economic instability, the fight for economic justice is front and center.

Another positive sign is that in recent years many social justice groups are busting out of complacent small group thinking and fearlessly moving on to the big fields of battle. Caring Across Generations, initiated by social justice groups National Domestic Workers Alliance and Jobs with Justice, has formed a giant labor, senior, community alliance to defend Social Security and Medicare while simultaneously organizing new workers and winning passage of Domestic Workers Bills of Rights at the state levels. New Bottom Line led by social justice community networks National Peoples Action, the Alliance for a Just Society and PICO, have united with labor and others to take on the banks. And in the electoral field numerous social justice groups which I named before are fighting for real electoral power and running candidates and initiatives rather than confining themselves to non-partisan voter registration and Get Out the Vote.

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There are huge stakes in the 2012 election. A defeat would be disastrous but a victory would be a major blow to the Southern Strategy and the power of white conservatives. A full political turn will require progressives to massively step up our game inside and outside of the electoral arena not only in 2012 but in the years to come. Isolating the far right and building the progressive movement must go hand in hand. If we can make some headway on these twinned tasks, we have a chance to emerge as a real force in national politics in what are sure to be perilous and volatile times shaped by demographic transition, imperial decline and environmental crisis.

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*Footnotes*

(1) Jonathan Chait, "Team Romney's White Vote Push," *Daily Intel*, Aug. 27, 2012.

(2) Ethan Bronner, "Voter ID Rules Fail Court Tests Across the Country," *NY Times*, Oct. 2, 2012.

(3) Voter statistics and commentary for the 2000, 2004 and 2008 elections can be found in my earlier articles on those contests which can be found through Google. The statistics are from the single national exit polls of those years.

(4) *It is impossible to determine exactly who identified as "Other Race" in 2008. If many Latinos chose this identity in the exit poll it may mask a significant additional rise in the Latino vote.*

(5) *Linda Burnham, "No Mandate from Women of Color," [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org), Jan. 8, 2005.*

(6) *See the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life poll released on Oct. 9, 2012:*

*<http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx> Barack Obama is the only Protestant among the current candidates for president and vice president but, characteristically, conservative white Protestants denounce him as a Muslim.*

(7) *I discuss some strategy issues based on an analysis of the U.S. electoral system in, "Notes Toward a Social Justice Electoral Strategy," [www.organizingupgrade.org](http://www.organizingupgrade.org), March 13, 2012.*

(8) *See for example, [www.voterparticipation.org](http://www.voterparticipation.org)*