

# Why do many Whites vote against themselves?

By Ron Walters  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Election pundits have repeatedly asked why Barack Obama has trouble attracting blue collar Whites as if he created the problem and could solve it. Hillary is seldom asked why Blacks don't vote for her, a problem she could solve. But it is interesting why blue collar Whites consistently vote against themselves, supporting Republicans who care little about their problems.

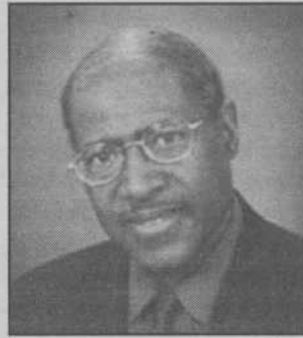
Part of the key lies in the fact that many such Whites, (defined as those with no college and who make an average family income of under \$50,000 per year) are like those in other classes who possess an attitude of racial supremacy. This has been important in maintaining a buffer between themselves and Blacks, keeping them on lowest rung in the socio-economic ladder.

The South has played a major role in harboring negative racial attitudes toward Blacks, which is why Obama has attracted such a small percentage of Whites there, a surprise it seems to media commentators. But negative racial attitudes toward Blacks formed during slavery are still alive in the South and many of the sons and daughters of those who created this dynamic left the agri-

cultural South and migrated North and helped to fertilize those areas.

Ronald Reagan was able to lead the movement of Whites who resented the presumed advantages that came to many Blacks through the policy of Affirmative Action and others who resented their children being educated in an integrated setting with Black children. As the Civil Rights Movement pushed for racial equality, working class Whites and others pushed back in the 1980s and 1990s to maintain the Whiteness of their neighborhood institutions as much as possible, along with their dominance over economic opportunity.

Globalization and technological change, however, began to shrink the number of industrial jobs, touching off a fight for the crumbs left by corporations who fled the country. Industrial jobs have remained stable at about 30 million, but they have been re-distributed overseas, and to Southern and Western regions of the United States. And as the Black middle class grew, it challenged White lower middle-class hegemony over



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many white collar jobs. So, the tension created by job competition led to Blacks being blamed for White economic immobility in some places. A deeper understanding of this issue requires reading such texts as, "The Possessiveness Investment In Whiteness," by George Lipsitz, who describes the tangible financial and psychological rewards that Whites get by their investment in White identity. And if Whiteness yields fewer hard economic returns, then the psychology of White supremacy may grow as a resource to hold on to.

The reason why blue collar Whites have trouble voting for Black candidates then, is that it would be a tangible concession that Blacks are not the cause of their condition, an admission that Blacks have an equal right to access social goods and most important, that they have as much right to posit the esteem of their own humanity as others do.

In the final analysis, we do not know how many in the blue collar class we are talking about here, so their number, and therefore,

their political importance may be over-estimated by those who worry about this problem. Obviously, their number cannot be as decisive as believed or Barack Obama would not have won as many Whites votes as he has to the extent that he is now leading in the popular vote. In any case, the political coalition that Obama has created, which includes middle and upper class Whites, youth, political independents, some Republicans and new voters, may be so potent that it reorganizes the Democratic party.

Blue collar Whites, a dwindling population, may only have a marginal effect on that political outcome – which looks like the future of the Democratic party.

Yet, blue collar Whites need to vote for a people politics that will deliver material goods now, not a party that opposes the minimum wage, school funding, job training and creation, and saving their houses – a politics of the past that bought their vote with the promise of psychological racial supremacy, but kept them at the margins of society.

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# Affirmative action actually died under Bill Clinton

By Harry C. Alford  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992 off the strength of the Black vote. We had just gone through three Republican administrations who illustrated a disdain for affirmative action.

However, the Civil Rights Act was renewed. Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday became a national holiday. And despite vile rhetoric, little was done to knock down any affirmative action laws. In Washington, D.C., perception is reality. Clinton knew this and so he painted a perception of progressive diversity during his first administration. Blacks were appointed to cabinet positions like never before. It was glorious to look at and the perception was "we had our first Black president."

But, oh, the romance was soon to end. As the Clinton Administration began to approach re-election time, he decided to reverse the perception and show the majority White population that he was actually tough on Blacks. Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary was drummed out through a litany of bad press. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy was actually indicted and had to resign to fight against the jive charges. He won but he spent over \$800,000 and hundreds of sleepless nights to do it. He never returned to government. The strongest cabinet secretary of all

was the Honorable Ron Brown. Ron was doing it. He was a brother who never forgot his roots. Thus, it was just a total shock when we were hit with the news that his Air Force plane ran into a mountain — no survivors. No such plane has ever done that before or after. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich promoted affirmative action with a vengeance. He left with bitterness soon after the re-election. He now is a supporter of Barack Obama.

It all came to a head when Republican candidates for 1996, Robert Dole and Jack Kemp, began to chant anti-affirmative action rhetoric. They claimed that they would end it immediately. Funny, Jack Kemp has and still claims to be an "honorary Black man." Well, he went pure red neck during this campaign.

To top all that, Min. Louis Farrakhan formed the Million Man March. This became the greatest day for the 1.6 million African-American males, including me, who participated in this holy event. It was a turning point for Black America and Bill Clinton felt the need to disassociate himself from it and stop losing White votes to Dole and Kemp. He also wanted to shape his legacy as someone



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who did not pander to the Black movement. On the very same day as the Million Man March, he announced his town hall meetings on race (something like "what do we do about the colored problem?") and began to craft his attack on affirmative action via the "mend it, don't end it" initiative.

Unlike the aforementioned cabinet members who brought a reputation of success and admirable independence, the Black participation in the second Clinton administration was drone like. His plan was launched. The largest agency for affirmative action was the U.S. Department of Transportation. Out of the blue came the initiative to replace the official program. 49CFR part 23 (the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program) was shelved and replaced with 49CFR part 26. This freed states and airports from the 10 percent minimum goal for minority participation to whatever they felt were attainable. Thus, Black business performance became almost nonexistent within a very short time. Millions of dollars and jobs evaporated from Black communities throughout the land because of this.

It gets worse. The most impactful thing President John F. Kennedy did was Execu-

tive Order 11246. This required record keeping of all businesses receiving federal money. There must be a continual head count done of the workforce including labor, management and executive levels. Deficiencies in diversity would be addressed and monitored by the U.S. Department of Labor. Failure to improve would amount to sanctions, fines and even debarment from doing government business. This law got our Black population into the general workforce.

Then, out of the blue again, in February, 1999, the Secretary of Transportation decides to cancel Executive Order 11246. He cancelled it!! How could that be legal? His explanation was that the Department of Labor is supposed to do it, not his staff. He closed all positions that dealt with recording the race and gender of the total workforce associated with the Federal Highway Administration. I went to the Black Secretary of Labor and she said they didn't have a budget for that. Thus, it was gone and the fix was in. Billions of dollars and thousands of jobs left the Black community thanks to good ol' boy Bill Clinton, the so-called first Black president, and the Congressional Black Caucus decided not to fight it. The problem still exists today.

It was a dark period for people of color. Harry Alford is the co-founder, President/CEO, of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

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not improving, but is going from bad to worse. One does not need to believe in the predictions of Nostradamus to recognize that a failure to bring about peace and justice between these groups could devolve into a regional, if not global conflict. Carter was and is correct to take such steps, and he needs our support.

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## Panther

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committee in support of a new trial for Michael Lewis. Also known as "Little B," Lewis was 13 years-old when he was sentenced to life in prison in 1977.

In an early highlight of her remarks, Brown recalled arguing with another African-American on an Atlanta street, as the two debated whether America had moved on from its ugly racial past: "I told him I'm trying to fight for our community, while

you're just trying to get a job on the plantation."

Later, the likes of Thomas Jefferson, Bill Clinton, Clarence Thomas and Bill Cosby, came under heavy rhetorical fire. In a sweeping historical treatise that condemned slavery, the Jim Crow era and the failings of the modern public school system, Brown attacked what she called "the New Age of Racism."

"This New Age racism completely disregards American history and says that our

present condition is all to do with personal choice," explained Brown. "We have the highest infant mortality rates, Black women and children make up 65 percent of AIDS cases and perhaps the most damning stat, less than one percent of U.S. revenues come from Black businesses. We're still not free and we're living in the house of our oppressor."

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