Where does race "matter" least? A search for that post-racial electorate.

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Abstract: In the aftermath of Barack Obama’s victory in 2008, pundits proclaimed the beginning of a “post-racial” society. Subsequent critiques have reminded us of persistent racial inequalities and racialized discourse has been resilient, but the underlying conceit of the notion of post-racial society—that racial politics had been fundamentally transformed somehow—was not closely examined. Using a new measure of ethnic voting appropriate for comparisons across time and space, this paper explores trends in ethnic division in voting in American politics, arguing that the 2008 election was not transformative, but rather that recent electoral politics in the United States have been notably divided along ethnic lines in both historical and comparative terms. It was not a “post-racial” election, it was the “most racial.” A subsequent subnational analysis identifies causes of and exceptions to this reality.

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The "Age of Obama", when it began, was lauded as a milestone in race relations and racial politics in the United States. In many ways, it certainly was: the nation elected its first African American president, and one of the few minority candidates to triumph in an election in which members of ethnoracial minority groups did not constitute a majority or plurality of the electorate (it's one thing to have the first black mayor of Gary or Detroit, or the first Latino mayor of El Paso, quite another to build a cross-racial coalition to win national office). More than that, Obama seemed to embody the post-racial, post-partisan ideal in his very person. Election night images of the tear-streaked cheeks of celebrants in Grant Park and of spontaneous street parties in many large cities—the base of the Obama operation and the previous site in so many instances of such virulent racial politics—provided stirring evidence for the claims of a new post-racial era.

After the night's celebratory air had cleared, however, analysts across the political spectrum began to reconsider the deeper implications of Obama's victory for the politics of race. The Right trumpeted the election as evidence that America had rehabilitated itself from its long history of racial injustice—we had taken our medicine, and now we were cured, so it was time to dismantle the legal and policy protections established against discrimination over the past half-century.

From the left, there was a more measured reaction: this certainly was a good development, but not a final triumph. These analyses tended to focus on persistent social division: socioeconomic inequalities, educational disparities, and the like—as opposed to political division (for examples from the public sphere, see Pitts 2009 and the National Urban League State of Black America 2009). The underlying implication of these "social" critiques was that we may not have a post-racial society, but that American racial politics were at the very least moving in the "post-racial" direction, even if they had not yet arrived. For the progressive community, overcoming a racially divided politics would indeed be a
significant triumph, and might be an important step in the direction of overcoming the racial social
divisions of which we are reminded by the critics of the “post-racial” discourse.

It is far from clear that we have indeed entered an era of post-racial politics, however. Racial
language, coded and otherwise, and the associated heightened tone of debate are persistent staples of
American politics, most recently under the banner of some of the Tea Party protests welling up from the
right over the past two years. Alongside this discursive presence of race in our politics is the endurance
and consolidation of racially-defined political orders— partisan electoral bases and elites—that make
rivals of groups and make every question of politics or policy deeply relevant for our identities as
members of groups in society. These political orders, which make up the rivalries and alliances of
national politics, are the focus of this paper.

In this exploratory paper, I present two preliminary findings in the search for that "post-racial"
electorate we have heard so much about since election night in 2008. First, the national electorate is
generally not moving in the direction of a "post-racial" politics. Rather, "ethnic" voting has been
increasing in the U.S. for as long as we have data, and particularly in the last decade, a trend that spans
regions and community-type. More, America is consistently more riven by race than most other
countries, though this level of division is driven largely by the South, a place where the racial past is
never past. Second, a geographically weighted regression reveals that the relationship between race
and vote is uneven: there are "hot spots", where race is a particularly salient electoral predictor, and
“cold spots”, where it is not.
Ethnic Voting in America: The re-Emergent Significance of Race?

Is the United States becoming less divided—politically—by race, and what can the election of Barack Obama tell us about the answer to this question? This is a difficult question to address, and this exploration, like any quantitative analysis, can only tell us part of the story. America's past has been characterized by racial conflict as much as by any other recurrent theme, and understanding the development of racial politics requires approaching from many methodological angles. Still, there are large, easily measured differences in political attitudes and behavior between groups in America (and these differences have developed in such a way that many political scientists argue that race is the heart of the contemporary racial divide). In this analysis, I address two simple questions: have American politics become less racially divided over time? And where is that racial divide deepest? (Or, for the optimist, where is it “shallowest”—where do we approach postracial politics?) The historical change and geographical variation in racial division—whether the forces of division or of comity are ascendant—is under investigation here.

Measuring “Ethnic Voting”

An analysis of change in the role of ethnicity in American electoral behavior requires analytical tools and measures with which to evaluate the relevant concepts and relationships. In this section, I describe a recently developed measure of "ethnic voting" which I use later to make two basic observations about

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1 Throughout these analyses, "race" and "ethnicity" are used fairly interchangeably. While the census (importantly) differentiates between the two kinds of difference, I operate under the common convention in social science analyses that makes the simplifying assumption to treats these groups as discrete instances of the same category of group. Following Chandra (2006), I operate under the definition of "ethnic identity categories [as] a subset of identity categories in which eligibility for membership is determined by descent-based attributes" with a few important restrictions. Unless otherwise specified, I use the four ethnicity categories identified as relevant to the concept of ethnic and cultural fractionalization: white, black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian. While Chandra uses the term ethnicity, in American politics these groups are often referred to as racial categories (see, for instance, Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (2002)).
American politics: First, ethnic divisions in voting patterns have steadily increased over the past half century, and American politics as it stands today is as ethnically divided as ever. Second, in comparative perspective American electoral politics are notable for their high levels of ethnic voting.

Measuring whether electoral politics are driven by ethnicity/race is not straightforward. There is a large literature on the causal mechanisms that connect race and racial attitudes to electoral behavior. Beyond the traditional concept of psychological racism, group interests (Kaufman 2008), racial threat (Key 1949), and exposure to leadership by other groups (Hajnal 2009) all play key roles in how our racial identities and attitudes inform our racial politics. There is also a large literature on the development of racial attitudes, and of the role of racially coded language in cuing racial attitudes, which may contribute to political and policy preferences in which race and ethnicity play a subtextual but important role (eg, Gilens 2000, Hajnal et al 2010, Hopkins 2010). Most of these analyses focus on the connection between an attitude and a behavior.

In a democracy, however, people may select their representatives for any number of reasons, and the attitudes that made them select that candidate are often, ultimately, opaque and ephemeral. Clearer and more permanent are the ascriptive characteristics of the voters—the demographic building blocks of politics that create electoral blocs and serve as shorthand for political actors to “read” the electorate. This shorthand that is often used by office-seekers when they craft platforms, frame appeals, and mobilize voters. When ethnic identities become closely tied to political identities and behavior, politics itself can become imbued with the irreconcilable demands of competing groups which are heightened by the strong feelings associated with ethnicity itself. Just as the post-racial society is an alluring ideal, deeply divided ethnic politics are usually undesirable: they can lead to political polarization and gridlock, they can contribute to the deepening of other kinds of social polarization, they can lead to violence, they are anathema to political liberalism, and so on. In short, the politicization of
ethnicity can lead to governance problems (Huber 2010). As America becomes an increasingly diverse nation, and as the white majority wanes over the coming decades, the trends in race politics will become increasingly important to understand—are we on a path to post-ethnicity or ethnic polarization? And how will race inform our attitudes, our coalitions, our representative institutions, and our policies?

**EV: Ethnic voting**

Below I work with a new measure that compares the voting behavior of different ethnic groups to each other, focusing on the relationship between ethnicity and vote choice and adopted from Huber (2010). The basic intuition of this measure of ethnic voting (EV) is that as it becomes more likely that an observer could predict a voter’s choice based solely on that voter’s ethnicity—and vice versa, predicting a voter’s ethnicity based solely on vote choice—the measure increases. For instance, if every member of group A voted for candidate \( C_a \), and every member of group B voted for candidate \( C_b \), that electorate would have a very high EV score. If members of each group voted for each candidate with about the same frequency, then the electorate would score very low on the measure. The measure is also weighted by the size of the groups—that is, as a group becomes larger, it makes a greater proportional contribution to the overall ethnic voting score of the electorate. Thus an election in which members of groups A and B each voted for their own candidates (\( C_a \) and \( C_b \)) would receive a higher score if there were equal numbers of A and B than if there were far more voters in group A than group B (or vice-versa). The measure ranges from zero (no difference in aggregate candidate choice across groups) to one (each group perfectly supports its own candidate, and all groups the same size). In the language of

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2 The mathematical concept of the measure is “weighted disproportionality”. The measure is the sum of the difference between groups’ vote for each candidate and the total electorate’s support for that candidate, weighted by group size. For a full description of the measure, related measures, its properties, and its analytical advantages, see Huber (2010).
the day, a lower score on the EV measure would tend to indicate a more “post-racial” politics, or at least a political alignment not organized around ethnicity.³

The chief advantage of this measure of ethnic voting is its comparability across electorates and its straightforward manner of interpretation, a major advantage it has over quantitative alternatives such as measuring the effect of ethnic identity on candidate choice in a standard multinomial regression, where coefficients are neither “combinable” for multiple groups nor comparable across elections (Huber 2010). While EV was developed for use in cross-national comparisons, it can also be used across time to explore changes in the American electorate. This allows us to use two comparative frames in judging how “post-racial” our politics are getting or how ethnically divided our coalitions have become. In the case of a time series, it may also be possibly to hypothesize why the measure rises and falls over time because the underlying math is relatively simple, so we can understand changes in the measure based on known historical events.

American ethnic voting in historical perspective

To spot trends in American ethnic voting over time, Figure 1 plots the national ethnic voting score over time for Presidential (solid line) and House (dotted line) elections in the US from 1948 to 2008 using data from the American National Election Study cumulative datafile. The basic observation is that Ethnic Voting has increased fairly steadily since we began collecting data. Three further observations are of immediate import. First, the largest increase came in the 1960s in the aftermath of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the entrance of millions of African Americans into the electorate. The political incorporation of large waves of immigrants from Latin America and Asia after the 1965

³ An important caveat: this measure says nothing about the discursive content or ideological underpinnings of politics; rather it focuses solely on one link—between the vote and ethnic identity.
contributed to this increase as well, but these groups are typically smaller and less distinctive portions of the electorate, so their contribution to the overall score would be smaller. Second, ethnic voting is generally higher in Presidential elections than in House elections. This may because House districts are typically more homogeneous than the nation, and because Presidential elections are typically closer. If large majorities of fewer groups support the same candidate, it is unlikely that there will be a very high ethnic voting score. Still, EV has been increasing for House votes along with votes for the President.

**Figure 1. Ethnic voting has increased over the past fifty years.**

Third, today’s national political alignment represents the highest levels of ethnic voting in recorded history (though the 2006 House vote did have a higher EV score than the 2008 House). From an historical perspective, we are more ethnically divided than ever—emphatically not “post”-racial.
American ethnic voting in comparative perspective

From the historical trend above, it is clear that American political life is becoming more organized around racial lines, not less, over time. However, because interpretation of EV is clearest in comparison, it’s not clear what it means for the US to go from a score of .05 in 1960 to .26 in 2008, other than to say it “increased.” To gain a better picture of how to think about the increasing ethnic division of American politics, I turn to a comparative perspective, using a dataset derived from a range of survey instruments to measure EV around the world. EV was designed for use in such comparisons, and its utility is in its flexibility: it is perfect for comparing electorates with different configurations of ethnic groups (Huber 2010).

As we can see from Figure 2 below, the United States has, over the past decade, typically displayed above-average levels of ethnic voting. This may be surprising, given the greater potential for ethnic mobilization in countries with proportional representation or with more regional parties. In fact, ethnic voting is higher in the US than in any other OECD democracy except Belgium; most of the other countries above the median of EV=.12 are from Africa and have very high levels of language-based ethnic diversity and multi-party systems. For instance, the most ethnically divided electorate in the dataset is South Africa (ZAF in the figure) in 1999 (EV=.57); South Africa has 13 significant ethnic groups and, at least then, several ethnically-based parties. However, according to this simple measure, that country has moved toward something more like a “rainbow nation”: in 2006, South Africa had an EV score of .22—lower than the United States in 2008.

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4 The dataset incorporates surveys carried out by the World Values Survey, Afrobarometer, and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) projects, ranging from 1996 to 2006.

5 In fact, PR actually tends not to politicize ethnicity. For a discussion of ethnic voting patterns and their relationship to ethnic voting, see Huber (2010).
Figure 2. The US has above-average levels of ethnoracial voting.

These comparative results again belie the notion that American politics are “post-racial.” By global standards, our politics are much more ethnically divided than is typical, and the other countries with similar levels of ethnic political division are hardly exemplars of tolerant democratic pluralism. To the contrary, many of those countries have been riven by violent ethnic conflict. That the US has sustained its high levels of ethnic political division without sustained, widespread ethnic violence may be attributable to the particular pattern of ethnic electoral politics and institutions we have: frequent rotation-in-office that has allowed the Democratic coalition, home to most minorities, access to power and faith that they will not be permanently “locked out;” and the ultimate result of the VRA of 1965 formally protected the representation of ethnic minorities in Congress. Other systems, be they proportional or majoritarian, may not provide similar possibilities for nonviolent minority mobilization and incorporation. Compared to other developed nations, however, we are much more divided. This
reality may hold insights for both sides: first, there may be institutional or informal political ideas on
offer in these other countries to ameliorate American ethnic political division; second, our pattern of
increasing diversity and increasing division may serve as a warning to Europeans, who have themselves
seen a recent rise in xenophobic rightist parties in the face of immigration. Mainstream politicians there
may seek to replicate or avoid the American experience, according to their own strategic interests.

Ethnic Voting in “Red and Blue America”

If American politics is not post-racial by historical or comparative standards, how can we characterize or
explain the heightened politicization of ethnicity in this country? For a preliminary answer to this
question, I turn to subnational analyses of the US, seeking the locations where ethnicity is least related
to vote choice. First, regional and state-level measures of EV show that it is indeed the South, the
historically famous site of Southerners who seem to power the high levels of ethnic voting in the US,
though the recent increase has been more widespread. Second, contrary to the typical conception of a
post-racial “blue” urban America, I find that cities are in fact the site of the highest levels of ethnic
political division. Third, I map the local relationships between race and vote in 2004, and note a few
institutional and social possibilities that may help overcome ethnic political division.

State and Region

The development of ethnic politics in the United States has had a heavy regional flavor. The South has
been characterized by demographic polarization between whites and African Americans and by white
economic and political supremacy; Northern cities have been the site of recurrent race riots and later of
local electoral competition between conservative whites and cross-racial coalitions; many states and
cities in the South and West have experienced similar patterns, with Latinos and Asian-Americans
seeking recognition of rights and competing as minority groups for political power against a white majority. Apart from differential histories of ethnic politics, these regions have had (more basically) different patterns of demographic development, shaped by migrations at particular historical moments. Given the different historical legacies and different ethnic compositions of different states and regions, it seems likely that we will observe different regional patterns when it comes to contemporary ethnic political division.

Figure 3 below shows this to be the case. Each small figure depicts the EV scores from 2000-2008 from the states in a given region, calculated using presidential vote choice data from the National Annenberg Election Survey. The most striking observation is the very high levels of ethnic voting in the South. Ethnic voting in the South, driven by the white-black divide, is as high as anywhere in the world, and has risen over the past decade. Within the South, the states with the highest African American populations—Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina— are the most ethnically divided. This reinforces the famous observation by Key (1949) that Southern districts with the highest black population elected the most racially conservative members of Congress—one of the bases of the racial threat hypothesis.
However, even if the South is the site of the highest levels of ethnic voting, the *rise* in ethnic division over the past decade was not localized there. Indeed, most states saw a steady increase over 2000-2008. New York and New Jersey, two fairly safe “Blue” states that went for the Democratic candidate in the last three electoral cycles, have among the highest EV scores (.17 and .20, respectively) and saw significant increases (from .14 and .15) in ethnic division over the 2000-2008 period. In the West, Nevada and New Mexico saw large gains in ethnic voting attributable to divisions between whites and Latinos. Only a few states saw a decrease, and these were mostly states—the Dakotas, Maine, Vermont—with exceedingly small levels of diversity, and almost necessarily low EV scores. Still, despite the national trend in the wrong direction, the localization of very high levels of EV in the South is not surprising, and goes a long way toward explaining the historical growth in EV nationally (as Southern
whites continue to shift toward the GOP and due in some measure to the mobilization of Southern African Americans for Obama) and in comparative perspective—leaving out the South, the US EV score is much lower (about average at .15, down from .22, in 2008).

**Urbanity: Red Country, Blue City?**

In addition to the famous Red-Blue electoral map that has developed over the past decade, a social narrative incorporating tropes about cultural differences between “Red” rural areas and “Blue” cities has also been commonplace among pundits. After the spontaneous street celebrations in large cities after Obama’s victory in November 2008, the “post-racial” narrative may have been conflated with urbanity, because large cities are the home of the cross-racial electoral base of the Democratic party. In Democratic stronghold cities like Chicago and New York, where over 80 percent of the electorate voted for Obama, EV was probably quite low. In general, however, the history of American cities has been characterized by ethnically polarized political conflict at the local level (Kaufmann 2008, Sonenshein 1994, Dahl 1961) as groups compete for resources and power in the local arena. It is unclear whether these local conflicts are overcome when voters turn their attention to the national level. Are cities post-racial utopias, as proponents of the racial contact theory might suggest? How do urban areas compare to the other types of places (rural and suburban) in terms of ethnic division?

Figures 4 and 5 below reveal the persistence of ethnic conflict in cities. As the site of the most ethnic diversity, urban areas have also been the site of greater ethnic political conflict in competition for national office as well. Figure 4 shows the historical trend, using ANES data from 1952 to 2000, the years for which a measure of urbanity is available. Urban areas are consistently more ethnically divided than rural or suburban areas (though much of this difference, especially early on, can be attributed to extremely small numbers of minority respondents in the non-urban areas).

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6 Though local EV scores are not available yet, the 2008 measure for Democratic Washington, DC—which has an identifier in the NAES dataset—was .06, well below the national average, and down from .20 in 2000.
Again, however, the broad trend is still toward higher levels of ethnic political conflict. This time series ends in 2000, however, well before the post-racial Age of Obama. Have America’s racial cleavages been narrowed in cities since then? Have the suburbs and countryside become the new site of ethnic electoral conflict? No. Figure 5 continues the urban-suburban-rural trendlines from Figure 4 using Annenberg data. Little seems to have changed in the ethnic division of the different kinds of places, and each level of urbanity has seen parallel, gradual shifts over the last three electoral cycles.
Ethnic Division without borders: GWR, Race, and Voting

The South and the City each exhibit higher levels of ethnic electoral division than their complementary parts in the nation. Where, if anywhere, does race “matter” less? The analyses above point to some states with particularly low levels of EV. Many of these may be artifacts of sample and measure, however—with a homogeneous local sample, a low EV score is almost assured. More to the point, few worry about the ethnic political divide in Vermont—it is elsewhere that our understanding of trends in ethnic politics must be updated. For the final exploratory analysis of this paper, I turn to a geographic approach to exploring where the relationship between ethnicity and vote choice is strongest. Just as EV is a blunt but suggestive instrument for understanding racial politics, so too is geographically weighted regression (GWR), a technique which allows us to visually depict the varying relationships between
variables over space (for a full description of the method, see Fotheringham et al 2000). Finding patterns in the results based on what we know about local politics and demography may help us move further in future analyses.

Figures 6 and 7 depict the relationship between racial identity and vote choice, or more precisely between whiteness and support for George W. Bush in 2004, measured using Annenberg Election Study data. Figure 6 depicts the bivariate relationship, making it akin to EV in that it accounts for no other variables in estimating the relationship. However, this simpler measure ("white or not") simplifies the growing multipolar diversity of the American electorate in a way that EV does not. Still, it roughly parallels EV for much of the country.

**Figure 6. Local relationship between whiteness and vote for George W. Bush, 2004 (Bivariate GWR)**

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7 In short, GWR estimates the local relationship between variables by estimating a weighted regression at each data point. The observations included in each regression are weighted according to their physical proximity to the point where the regression is being estimated. All model parameters are estimated at all points, resulting in a huge matrix of estimates usually best viewed using a geographic information system.

8 Because this is a regression framework, and only one variable can be used at a time I use a simple dummy variable for “white” ethnic identity; geographically weighted measures of EV are under development. Also, geographic indicators for 2008 NAES data were not available at writing.
There are some subtler exceptions, however. First, GWR does not recognize boundaries or indicators, taking only spatial proximity into account when estimating relationships. This allows for cross-state trends to be more easily seen, and for metro-area variation to pop out. It is a useful data exploration tool. This flexibility allows us to see a few things more clearly. Each dot in Figure 6 is a linear probability model regression coefficient indicating the locally weighted correlation between whiteness and vote for Bush in 2004. The precise interpretation is straightforward: for instance, a coefficient of .5 means that a white voter at that point is 50 percent more likely than a non-white voter to choose Bush. While the average, or global mean, estimated correlation between race and vote is .23, there is a wide range of local variation: the correlation between race and vote in western Louisiana is about .7; in Seattle, it is -.36— that is, being white actually made one less likely to vote Republican.

For the map as a whole, the dark dots indicate a strong local relationship— these are concentrated in the South, but also in a few patches further north through western Ohio and in Minnesota, for example. The middle-dark dots indicate “average” relationships between race and vote (ie, the range of local coefficient estimates within one standard deviation of the mean). A wide range of types of places fall within this range. Finally, the lightest dots reflect places, like Seattle referred to above, where whiteness is not correlated with Republicanism. Given what we know about the particular ethnic character of the American electorate as a whole (a majority of whites choose GOP candidates, and varying majorities of minority groups choose Democrats), these places would seem to have a less ethnically divided local electorate. In an important distinction from EV, these estimates do not “punish” a place for local diversity; low coefficients are still more likely in homogenous places, however, just as low EV scores were likely in homogenous electorates. Still, there are a few notable places where there is a particularly low correlation between whiteness and GOP vote. First, several large cities, including Boston, Seattle, San Francisco, Miami, and New York have very low estimates for the coefficient. This is in keeping with the “post-racial city” narrative. Second, two large, largely white, rural areas have very
low correlations: rural New England and the coal belt of West Virginia, eastern Ohio, and northern Kentucky. The first probably reflects a homogeneous, liberal population. The second, however, is an intriguing find, especially when compared to the electoral map of 2008, when it was one of the few regions in which Obama actually won less of the vote than Kerry did four years before. This is a place where racial conservatism and homogeneity meet union liberalism in a relationship fraught with uncertainty. While 2008 data would reveal whether this local relationship held, the state-level EV analysis above (Figure 3) indicates that West Virginia, despite a very small minority population, did leap in EV from 2004 to 2008—not the more secular linear trend found in most states from 2000 to 2008.

Finally, Figure 7 depicts the same relationship as Figure 6 (the correlation between whiteness and vote), but these coefficients are estimated using a multivariate GWR. To a great extent, we might argue, race is really class. Perhaps ethnic groups are riven not over ethnic conflict \textit{per se}, but over the classic Left-Right divide over redistributive politics (the two possibilities are certainly not mutually exclusive; they are probably mutually \textit{constitutive}).

\textbf{Figure 7. Local relationship between whiteness and vote for George W. Bush, 2004 (Multivariate GWR)}
This GWR model includes measures of income, education, and religiosity to find where the relationship between race and vote stands up when these other explanatory variables are taken into account. The story is much the same. The range of the coefficients has narrowed, and the mean coefficient on “White” is slightly higher, at 0.27. Most of the relative relationships are parallel, with one important exception: taking the other factors into account, for most locations in the “average” category, allows the regression coefficient for race to be measured more efficiently, and in almost all cases except the rural zones where the relationship is very close to zero and where there is little variation on the independent variable of race, the relationship between race and vote is now statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level—in the bivariate local relationships, most of these lower-magnitude relationships were not statistically significant. Taking the other factors into account does not make race matter less—it makes it clearer that it does matter.

**Conclusion**

It is no secret that American racial politics have a long, divisive—and at times bloody—history. The election of Barack Obama as our first African American president seems a signal moment in racial progress: a cross-racial coalition of liberals had elected a progressive chief executive, and his coattails had helped bring in huge majorities on Capitol Hill as well. All the triumphalism about the end of race, however, was certainly overblown. Racial undertones (and overtones, too) have characterized the emergence of the far-right tea party movement over the past two years, and the polarized discourse of the age may reflect the heightened feelings of conservative white Americans seeking to take the country “back” in the same way that Bernie Epton urged Chicagoans to defeat Harold Washington before it was “too late.”
Racially-charged discourse has a long history, and few believed it would disappear with Obama’s election. Similarly, we would be too optimistic to believe that deep social and economic inequalities would immediately evaporate with the rise of a black President. Those discursive and social markers of the continuing significance of race have been identified clearly by analysts seeking to temper the excitement about the Age of Obama. However, a more basic observation has generally been lacking: that the Obama election itself was not actually a triumph of post-racial politics. Rather, it represented the continuation of a long trend toward a more racial politics, as measured by the identities of those who line up in opposing political coalitions. The precise causes of this long trend are nuanced and multiple, and not all of them are “bad”: the Voting Rights Act, the incorporation and mobilization of nonwhite voters by Democrats (and much less outreach by Republicans), between-group socioeconomic inequality, and so on. These alignments may or may not reflect racism, but they reflect race regardless; and as politics remains divided along ethnic lines, the ideological polarization of recent years is likely to be exacerbated as ideology becomes increasingly allied with political and more dearly held ethnic identities. The flight to the Republicans among white Americans has so far kept pace with the growing diversity of the country as a whole. This interplay of groups and parties echoes the political development of cities across America just a generation ago, as newcomers arrive and whites defect. In many of those cities, there was a reorganization of racial politics, and a return to white-led rule—in other places history saw a virtual abandonment of the city by whites and their relative affluence. The development of national politics remains to be written. At that level, however, we are not in the post-racial age—today’s politics are the most racial they’ve been in decades.
Works Cited


