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**“Minority but not Black”**

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One of the more interesting dimensions of the 2002 elections was the growing power of non-black minority voters. In New York State, incumbent Republican George Pataki crushed black Democratic challenger H. Carl McCall, in part, by winning nearly 40 percent of the state’s Latino vote. Pataki effectively co-opted traditionally Democratic constituencies, especially unions and Latinos.

This disturbing pattern of “playing the Latino card” against black candidates and black interests is increasingly common throughout the country. Nationally, only one-half of all Hispanic voters consider themselves Democrats, compared to over 80 percent among African-American voters.

In Texas, a growing plurality of Mexican Americans consider themselves to be conservative Republicans. Back in 1998, 49 percent of the Latino vote went to re-elect then-Governor George W. Bush. Last year, in Houston’s mayoral election, Republican candidate Orlando Sanchez, a Hispanic, nearly defeated black Democratic candidate Lee Brown. In the 2002 Senate race in Texas, about 40 percent of the state’s Latinos voted against black Democratic candidate Ron Kirk. The Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce also endorsed the white Republican candidate over Kirk, despite the fact that the Democratic ticket included a Latino millionaire, Tony Sanchez, as their party’s candidate for governor.

In municipal elections, a similar pattern is occurring. In New York City, about 30 percent of Hispanics supported Rudolph Giuliani’s re-election as mayor in 1997, and almost one-half voted for Republican billionaire Michael Bloomberg for mayor in 2001.

In Los Angeles, Republican former mayor Richard Riordan received over 40 percent of the Latino vote. As the Latino population has increased in majority black districts, many Latinos

are building coalitions with white conservative and Republican interests to replace and defeat African-American liberal Democratic incumbents.

A similar pattern toward Republicanism is developing among Arab Americans. It was not terribly surprising that in the presidential race of 2000, that only 38 percent of the Arab-American vote went to the Gore-Lieberman ticket. A plurality of Arab-American voters, 45.5 percent, favored Bush-Cheney. In the 2000 Congressional races, the Arab-American vote was almost equally divided between Democrats and Republicans.

Although the majority of Arab-American elected officials remain Democrats, a growing number are Republicans. These Republicans include California Congressman Darrell Issa, Connecticut Judge Fred Anthony, South Dakota State Senator Gene Abdallah, New York State Senator Thomas Libous, Michigan State Senator Nancy Cassis, and Illinois Congressman Ray Lahood—all of whom were either elected or re-elected in November 2002.

In an October 2002 Zogby poll, over seventy-five percent of all Arab-American voters stated that the Middle East is a “very important” or “somewhat important issue determining their vote.” The Democratic Party’s traditional, unquestioning support for Israel is undoubtedly the primary reason that American Arabs by the hundreds of thousands are becoming Republicans. What’s significant to black interests about this trend is that Arab Americans are highly concentrated in areas that frequently are represented by African Americans.

Nearly 90 percent of all Arab-American citizens are registered to vote, according to the Arab American Institute. Arab Americans are concentrated in key states—650,000 in California, 410,000 in New York, 400,000 in Michigan, 270,000 in Florida, 250,000 in New Jersey—where bloc voting could determine the balance of power in both Congressional and presidential elections.

The politics of race in America used to be black vs. white. African Americans now need to wake up to the reality that this is no longer true. In virtually every major U.S. city, the Hispanic electorate and other non-white immigrant groups are growing much faster than the

black electorate. This is even true in the South. In North Carolina, for example, the state's Latino population grew from barely 80,000 in 1990 to one-half million by 2000. In Atlanta, over 256,000 foreign-born people arrived in that city in the 1990s. These statistics reveal that blacks, who for four centuries have been accustomed to negotiating racial politics with whites as a group, must develop a whole new strategy.

The real political irony here that many new immigrants and non-black minority voters fail to comprehend, is the structural racism that exists within the American political system, and especially, within the core constituencies of the Republican Party. The GOP still consistently uses race as its principal wedge issue to mobilize racist white voters, and to divide and confuse the working class. The Republicans aggressively want to dismantle most of the basic reforms won by the black freedom movement, such as affirmative action, pushing us back to a time when minorities as a group could be overtly excluded from professional and managerial positions. The destruction of welfare, the mass disfranchisement of former prisoners, the elimination of public housing and public investments of all kinds in human services, works against the real interests of Hispanics, Arab Americans, most Asian Americans—as well as black Americans.

The father of prominent black conservative Republican J.C. Watts, the former Congressman from Oklahoma, said it best, when he observed that a black person voting Republican makes about as much sense as a “chicken voting for Colonel Sanders.” The new minority voters haven't figured that out yet.

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