

# Time, Timing and Being On Time: The Play of Race and Ideology in the Postmodern Political Organization

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## ABSTRACT

*An understanding of the definition and dynamics of time is necessary to the conception of a "postmodern" political organization. Additionally, the nuances of time illustrate the shifting role that race has and continues to play in postmodern politics. This article discusses the relationship between time, race and politics by emphasizing three primary aspects of time: time itself, as the condition for political action; timing, which expresses a particularly strategic process of political action; and being on time, which signifies the fulfillment of political strategy. This understanding of the contours of time is illustrated by the dynamics of "black politics" in the American political system, and among Democratic and Republican party organizations.*

## A BRIEF ETYMOLOGY OF TIME

Prior to our discussion of the role that race and ideology play in the postmodern political organization, we must of necessity consider the centrality of time to our endeavor. The metaphysics and experience of time is that which links all of the issues discussed in the following pages and without an understanding of its origins, the variety of its uses in the English language and the mode of being manifest in such usage one cannot fully understand the complexity and dynamism of race and ideology as it is expressed in the uniquely American way of doing politics. Thus time is both the beginning and end of our explorations in this regard, especially the way that "time," "timing" and the concept of being "on time" are related to each other, to race and ideology and to politics and the formation/sustenance of political organizations.

While there may be only one metaphysical "objective" time as concept, there are, as Gebser takes great pains to help us understand, varied ways of "living" time. "Time," in the Indo-Germanic language, refers to a distinctively rational way of living and conceptualizing time. Here we find in the kindred Greek use of the word "da", meaning

"to divide, to take apart, to lay apart, to tear apart, to lacerate" (Gebser, 173). As Gebser notes, what is divided with the onset of rational time is the awareness of "day" and "light" as opposed to the darkness of magical temporality. The concept of division inherent in the word time foregrounded daylight and draws attention to a related characterization of rational time – direction and directedness. Thus, the dawning of separation between night and day in the flow of experience embeds a spatial metaphysic in the mental rational temporal world. It is only in the light of day that one can know where one is going and, consequently, when one is going. Such an illumination affords the rational with the foresight necessary to plan, prepare and order ones steps, thus providing a comfortable amount of certainty for one's movement and action.

From the root of time we have thus far plotted the related concepts of division, spatiality, order, planning and direction. These lead us to another use of the word time – *timing*. Timing has use as both noun and verb, as does its sister term, synchronic. By combining the Greek prefix "syn" to *chronos* we get the derivation of synchronous meaning "together in time". As a noun, it is an act of simultaneity, something at

the same time. It also signifies agreement or coincidence. The meaning of the word changes quite drastically when we add the suffix "ize," meaning "to cause to be, conform to, or resemble," from the original Greek meaning of "ize" as "origin," and it is linked to concepts of fashioning or making. In verbalizing synchronicity then we have not just a "coincidental" occurrence or chance happening. With synchronization or timing we incorporate concepts of manipulation, direction and purpose. Synchronizing is technological. Something is fashioned with the express purpose of accomplishing a task in this case, of causing the simultaneous occurrence of things or making things (thoughts, actions, public opinion, etc.) coincide with one another.

As we move our discussion to issues of race and politics, we see that they are framed by these ideas of careful planning, manipulation, and willful creation and recreation of concepts, ideas, people, and actions such that things fit rationally one with the other – that they agree, are not disparate or dissonant – that they in essence make sense. Time is the necessary condition for consciousness, timing a willful act of purposeful manipulation. To be "on time" is another way of expressing the accomplishment of such manipulation. To be on time is to be "on top" of things – to not only be simultaneously present, but physically above it in the position of domination necessary for the manipulative act.

### RACE, IDEOLOGY AND TEMPORALITY

The terms "race" and ideology are both fundamentally temporal in nature and are each related quite closely to the ideas raised in the previous section, that of time, timing and being on time. This is demonstrated in the concept of race in several ways. First, race is a term used for the purpose of categorization. Initially, the term was devoid of the signifying link to solely physical, mainly skin color attributes and attributions. Race was used as a tool for doing with human beings what was being done by scientists with other living species – an exhaustive description and categorization of human types. Initially, such categorizations were ideologically unmotivated –

except of course for the implicit drive of scientific ideology to exercise control over nature. In its abstract form, race as a category was devoid of value-laden attributions between one "race" and another, just as one species of horse, for instance, was not necessarily seen as better or worse than another. They were, simply different. Thus, I conceptualize a difference in race as an abstraction or mental construct from the lived experience of race – a similar difference found in the aforementioned discussion of time.

The transformation of race as an abstract mechanism of human categorization to one that included as a necessary part of such characterizations certain value attributions, demonstrates the move from abstraction to lived experience. That is, the concept of race, as we have grown accustomed to using it, began when physical descriptions of observable characteristics were intertwined with the necessarily subjective judgments about those characteristics. Race, as we have come to use it, was initiated in the communicative act – the process of human interaction that began to be the foundation of scientific descriptions and categorizations of "the races."

To put this a different way, one can sit with a pen and paper and naively observe human beings and sketch the varieties of differences one sees. Though limited, this manner of abstract description takes into account visible physical features as the basis of thinking about or documenting human difference. But it is when interaction takes place between the observer and the observed – the categorizer and the categorized – that the former "pure" description becomes so entangled with the attribution of meaning such that both the description and the attribution are one in the self-same "objective" characterization and basis for categorization. In interaction we move from abstraction to race as a lived phenomenon by invoking the necessary aspect of rational communication – interpretation.

In the abstract, one may view an African and identify the observable physical feature of a broad nose, for example. As the abstraction

changes to a process of interaction, what is seen and described as "broad" is done so vis-à-vis the thin, narrow nose of the European observer. Beyond this, however, in the contextualized, ecological process of interaction of the European with the African, this broad nose is no longer merely an identifying characteristic. The broad nose is interpreted. It comes to have meaning. It is no longer sufficient to make the ontological claim that the African possesses a "broad" nose, it is necessary to understand and provide a reason why such a nose exists. It is in answering this question – an interpretive rather than ontological one – that we begin to see the interaction of difference that is the necessary condition of identity or identification.

With the marriage of ontology and interpretation in regard to human physiognomy and physiology comes the idea of human difference as not only varieties of differences in "type", but fundamental differences in "kind." Continuing with our previous example, The European scientist/missionary/colonizer, attributes the African's broad nose to its function and concludes that it is necessary to him because of the primacy of olfaction in his manner of attaining sustenance and otherwise surviving. The European further concludes that the overuse of olfaction is in stark contrast with his European's exercise of the brain and mental capacity as the primary way of sense-making and survival. Further, it was already previously defined that thinking and reason were the fundamental characteristics of humanness. The dependence of olfaction for the African then seemed to be closer to that of other animals rather than to the European (human). And, because in their interactions the European scientist characterized the Africans' mythical and magical mode of awareness as being decidedly non-rational, he concluded that the African not only minimally used his brain, but lacked the very capacity for rational thought. This being the case, there was a fundamental difference in kind between the European human and the African animal or savage.

Franz Boas describes this process in outlining his definitions and conceptualizations of race, contending that,

*We are not so much concerned with the form of the body as with its functions, for in the life of a nation the activities of the individual count rather than his appearance. There is no doubt in my mind that there is a very definite association between the biological make-up of the individual and the physiological and psychological functioning of his body (9).*

As we can see, it is the assumption that physiology and function are related to the attribution of psychological processes that include reason, motivation and others, despite the fact that the physiology is the only empirically observable object.

Thus far we have only established that the spatialization of time is also found in the concept of race, but not the centrality of time itself. For this we delve deeper into this concept and process of categorization via its etymology and relationship to kindred linguistic usages. A "category", derived from the Greek *kategoria*, or *kata + agora*, is related to the terms predicate(ion), to accuse or affirm, public assembly, or to gather. "Predicate" adds to its meaning as a designation of a property or relation, or (from the Latin) to publicly assert or preach, as in to assert something to be a quality, attribute or property of something. Finally, from predicate we get meaning as a base from which other assertions are made, as in "these conclusions are predicated on..."

Here we see both time and space incorporated into our understanding of the term category or its verb, to categorize. It is the assertion regarding an attribute of a particular thing being characteristic, and thus inclusive of another thing so as to provide the basis or the precondition for following, subsequent, statements and/or conclusions to be drawn.

Two things are significant here. First, our initial link of time with race via its use as a way of categorizing human attributes. Thus, essential to the very notion of category is implied service in

the function of a larger project or purpose. That is, categorization does not exist for the sole purpose of simply describing things. It is used as basis from which other statements about reality can be made. Second, the term's relationship to ideas regarding the "public," "assertions" and "to preach," establish the process of categorization as a rhetorical tool. So not only do we, in our understanding of the term categorize, get our temporal linkage to race, we also see the germination of the relationship of race and time to politics.

The most clear aspect of the relationship of race and time however does not come until we trace the origin and use of the term "race" itself. It is here that we see there is no accident that the idea of race as a category and process of categorization arose in the fifteenth century, but was based on the fourteenth century term "race" which referred to "flow" or the flowing (generally of water) through a course. Additionally, this term signified a set course or duration of time and the flow of life itself. Here we begin to see the second linkage of race with time in the idea of progress. With the onset of rational time in the perspectival world, time began to be seen not simply as that which flowed, but that which did so between two identifiable points – a beginning and an end. The idea of progress embodies all of the semantic connections we have discussed thus far between time, race and politics, via concepts of willfulness, manipulation, and categorization. This notion of progress clarifies the purpose of categorizing in general, and the project of racial categorization in particular. Categorizing human "species" was essentially a mechanism for marking "origin" and tracking the progression of living beings throughout time for the purposes of both delineating that which is presently at the top of the food chain and in the front of the proverbial line. This allowed some predictive conclusions to be drawn about the destiny of certain groups or types of animals. What living beings were present at origin? Which still exist today? Which of these will exist one-thousand years from now and how will they be different? More importantly, why have some ceased to exist? Why have others continued and

how can we ensure the preservation of those deemed to be worthy of such? These are all questions of time wrapped into the project of categorization.

With the domination of the rational attitude as it applies to race, it was obvious that the European embodied the *non plus ultra* of progress within the human species, while the darker people of the world were less evolved. It is no wonder that the term "manifest destiny," the cry of European colonists particularly in North America, was used to signify, in part, that the European's end was to be master and the African slave[1]. Physiognomy and physiology determined the category, the respective attributes of those included within it, and this determined in retrospect one group's beginning, and in prospect, its end. Having determined one's beginning and end, those at the top of the evolutionary ladder could structure the requisite form of relationship appropriate between them and those behind and below.

Before continuing, we must establish a third and final connection of race with time. For this we return to the project of categorization and look more fully at the term "type." In its characteristic mechanistic form of usage, "type" means a physical impression; blow or model (Greek *tupos*) and also refers to a "distinctive" mark or stamp. In keeping with its close association to the project of categorization, "type" also signals a number of people or things with common traits. What is important for our discussion here is the direct connection with "image" and visualization that the term "type" suggests. When we combine this with the usage of the term in regards to writing, printing and mass communication insofar as moveable "type" provided the technology for the wide distribution of the printed page, we come to understand the relationship of "type" to time in the idea of efficiency. In this regard, racial "types" provide visual images of physical features of human beings for the ease of categorization. This has also resulted in an implicit conveyance of a particular "impression," attitude, sentiment or judgment regarding a particular racial type.

Racial categorization allowed certain images to become part of the human sensory manifold such that when one saw someone of a particular racial type, they recognized simultaneously with that visualization, the required attribution. This is to say there was little dissociation between the expression ("Negroid", for example) and the expressed (savage, simple-minded, etc.). The level of identification of expression with expressed allows for judgments to be made in the least amount of time – circumventing the time it takes to think about what it is one is seeing. When one sees, one immediately knows what one is seeing.

Thus far I have shown the way in which race is inextricably linked to time, and have identified those ideas that will be relevant to the remainder of our discussion concerning race and politics. Before we get into some of the case studies that provide evidence for the assertions found here, I must of necessity discuss the relationship of the aforementioned concepts with what many thinkers deem the primary characterization of our contemporary Western age – postmodernism. Specifically, I call attention to the centrality of time to the notion of postmodernism and raise the question of whether and how race and politics intersect in the presumed postmodern world.

#### **PERMANENCE AND CHANGE: POSTMODERNITY AND AMERICAN RACE POLITICS**

What is postmodernism? The only real answer seems to be that any answer still begs the question. Many have taken the most simple route, defining the term by breaking it into its constituent parts – "post" and "Modernism," characterizing it temporally as that which follows the modern period. Charles Jencks (1995), for instance, points to a particular point in time demarcating the end of the modern era and the beginning of the postmodern. For him, the modern period (in architecture) ended at 3:32 p.m., July 15, 1972 when the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis was demolished because it was no longer deemed habitable. Despite this however, Jencks

recognizes the implicit difficulty in definition. "It is a question (What is postmodernism?), as well as the answer I will give, and one must see that its continual growth and movement meant that no definitive answer is possible – at least not until it stops moving" (29).

In Jenck's dual answer to the question of postmodernism is embodied what I believe is the most definitive characteristic of postmodernity, the dynamic interplay of permanence and flux, stability and change, standardization and chaos. That this is so is exemplified in the development of the meaning and usage of the term "race" from its origins that I have previously discussed, to our contemporary time. Permanence and change represent the radical shift in the rational manifestation of temporal awareness. That is, no longer is time itself, and human history considered to be flowing in a one way direction toward some fixed goal. Postmodern time, or what Gebser would refer to as *aperspectival* time, pervades all spatio-temporal contexts and contingencies – flowing backwards and forwards, up and down, everywhere and nowhere, simultaneously. In this regard then, it is a mischaracterization when one refers to modernity as an end and postmodernity a beginning. It is more accurate to say our contemporary age is characterized by a constant shift between modernity and postmodernity – that the two, rather than being dually bifurcated are inextricably linked (Kramer, 1997; Mickunas, 2003).

Race is clearly a modern conception. It embodies the modern ideals of order, permanence, categorization, efficiency, control, linearity and progress, the primacy of vision, science and exploration. However, the manner in which race is lived and used in our contemporary world, particularly in the political realm, defies many such conceptualizations. This does not mean that the permanence of race is no longer in play. Nor does it mean that race is completely ephemeral – defying objectification to the point that it is no longer meaningful. Nor does it mean that many scholars and ordinary citizens alike do not struggle to make either of these cases the lived reality of race in America.

A good example of this struggle is found in a 1993 special issue of *The Black Scholar* journal where black scholars squared off on the social and political implications of race, postmodernity and multiculturalism. For those proponents of postmodern multiculturalism, represented in this debate by scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, Jon Michael Spencer, Gerald Early and others, the diffusion of racial lines, racialized thinking and the very deconstruction of the concept of race itself, is a necessary condition for decentering the dominant Eurocentric thrust of the Western academy. The destruction of racial thinking, for these scholars, is the best strategy for counteracting the negative perceptions and stereotypical images that racial reasoning has brought about. Their focus on "culture" is seen as a better focus given its understanding as an invented human phenomenon, rather than the naturalistic term "race." In a "multicultural" world one could come to view human differences as arbitrary, rather than biologically linked to identifiable groups of people. And, because such cultural differences are arbitrary, no hierarchical valuations of one culture over another would be reasonable.

For the opponents of multiculturalism, the path to racial liberation from the negativity of race is not attained via its deconstruction, but through reinscription. That is, rather than making claims against the validity of race as a construct, the better strategy is to redefine what race means and alter the negative associations with particular races. It is on this premise that Afrocentrism, for instance, is based. This particular mythology seeks to alter our perceptions about the origins of black people by touting the glories of the African continent and African peoples. Jesus was black. The people who built the pyramids were black. The very origins of civilization are found in Africa. As Molefi Asante, who accuses multiculturalists of "racing to leave the race", puts it:

*Afrocentricity is the belief in the centrality of Africans in post modern history. It is our history, our mythology, our creative motif, and our ethos exemplifying our collective will. On the basis of our story, we build upon the work of our ancestors who gave signs toward our humanizing function. (6).*

This strategy to rehabilitate Africa is, in part, a way to question popular associations of blackness with various forms of inferiority. In effect, it says that blacks cannot be inferior because they are from the most superior of origins.

But perhaps what is more interesting and more important and relevant to our purposes here, is not the particular detailed arguments from each side of the debate. The most telling aspect is, rather, the question, "why?" Why is this debate of such concern particularly among African Americans, as well as other racial minority groups? What is most at issue here is this idea of "agency"; a concept central to politics and political action which is essentially about power - who has it, how it is exercised, and towards what ends. Proponents of racial reinscription (and within-group solidarity) argue that if we deconstruct race, stripping it of its meaning and validity, then on what grounds do blacks and other racial groups exercise political agency regarding "racial issues"? That is, if there really is no "race," then there is no "racism," and if that be so, then on what grounds do we challenge political institutions' racist practices that impact individuals at both the social and economic level? On the one hand it is peculiar that those who have suffered most from racial reasoning are now some of its strongest advocates. But this calls attention to the most fundamental aspect of race in a postmodern age - interests.

Ideologies are stable, permanent, immutable. And race was at one time (and still is to some) the prevailing ideology. But in a postmodern world of disconnection and dissociation, race is no longer an enduring, categorical, dogmatic subject that one adheres to. In short the modern ideology of race has given way to unstable, always shifting waves of interest. This can be seen in the evolution of "race politics" in America from Reconstruction, through the Civil Rights era to the present. What we see having and currently taking place is the supplanting of racial ideology as the prime motivation in American politics to a time given over to racial interest group politics, and finally, to our current

time which is altogether different in that another ideology - that of wealth and capital – is displacing the need, desire and effectiveness of either racial ideology or racial interest group politics.

### RECONSTRUCTION: PERMANENCE AND THE POLITICS OF BENEVOLENCE

The very term “reconstruction” signals the desire to reconstruct that which was previously destroyed - to enhance permanence. In the case of the American system of government, the mayhem resulting from the Civil War necessitated the establishment of some order. Indeed it was in the interest of order, the stability of the American colonies, that the war was fought. Some have made the claim that “state’s rights”, or a myriad of other issues, rather than slavery, was the central issue about which the Civil War was fought. But it is quite clear that the issue of race and slavery was inextricably linked to the issue of state agency since what was of dispute was the Southern colonies’ rights to own slaves. However, despite being split North versus South, despite the interests in maintaining slavery or abolition, racial ideology was common amongst all. While one group viewed blacks as inhuman chattel and the other as equal status as human beings as whites, both believed in the fundamental difference between the races and believed that some form of permanence in terms of the treatment and social status of the races was central to political stability.

This is demonstrated, to some degree, in the words of Lincoln who, contrary to popular belief, was not a staunch supporter of abolition. Following emancipation, which was done in order to preserve the Union rather than to abolish slavery per se, Lincoln told a gathering of black leaders:

*You and we are different races. We have between us a broader difference than exists between almost any other two races. Whether it is right or wrong I need not discuss, but this physical difference is a great disadvantage to us both, as I think your race suffers very greatly, many of them by living among us, while ours suffers from your presence. (New York Times, 1989, p.1).*

This was from the leader of the Republican Party who was seen as the champion of the rights of blacks. In order to maintain permanence, as well as solidify the power of the political parties, Republican politicians aided blacks via legislative action to the ends of creating and sustaining their loyalty. It was this unfettered loyalty that ensured that what blacks gained politically was only that which was given to them by whites. Race politics, insofar as blacks were concerned was characterized by blacks’ reliance on white benevolence. Indeed, what was the case more often than not was that token legislation was advanced for blacks by whites, thereby affording their loyalty, but the actions had little power in enforcement. That is, despite legislation to the contrary, the normative rules in the South and parts of the North was still that of black subjugation and inequality. Yet blacks themselves had no real alternatives. They could not look to the Democrats who still favored their enslavement, nor could they count on Republicans to enforce laws that they themselves passed. It is because of this lack of agency on the part of blacks that the established political and social order maintained the separation and inequality of racial groups. Despite the election of a number of black representatives to Congress during the period, most of their voices were stifled either because there was significant objection to their seating or they were, quite simply ignored.

### CIVIL RIGHTS: JUST PERMANENT INTERESTS

Former Congressman William Clay, one of the first blacks to hold a seat in Congress during and following the new era of Civil Rights wrote a book chronicling the history of blacks in Congress. Clay, part of a new kind of black Congressmen who found himself in a much different political and social milieu than those before him, aptly titled his book *Just Permanent Interests*. The book is appropriately titled because it identifies, as I have previously mentioned, the central aspect of postmodern race politics. What happened during Civil Rights era is that the impotent legislative action that was the avenue for securing rights during Reconstruction was buttressed by political

action that took place by the masses outside the halls of Congress. In such a short period of time, monumental events took place in America that demanded the attention of the entire country. The marches in the streets of the South in the 1950s and 1960s, began to heighten the attention of both blacks and whites alike. Because of increased attention to the newest mass medium, television, the American public en masse watched the Bull Connors of the world sounding their racist rhetoric of hatred, heard the loud cries of George Wallace screaming "segregation now, segregation tomorrow", and watched the passionate Martin Luther King Jr. exclaim, "I have a Dream." The nation tuned in to America's President, John F. Kennedy as he lay dead in the morgue, while landmark civil rights legislation lay waiting in the wings. The nation witnessed as the deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X sparked riots in the streets, threatening to burn the very foundations of America.

At the same time, towards the late sixties and into the seventies America saw the raised fists and exclamations of "Black Power" by the likes of Angela Davis, Stockley Carmichael, and others, listened to popular music now infiltrated with black political protest by artists from James Brown to Stevie Wonder to Gil Scott Heron (not to mention other popular protest music from white artists such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and others) and elected a new breed of black politicians in the form of Shirley Chisolm, Ronald Dellums, Charles Rangel, John Conyers and others.

So, what made this era different in terms of the way in which race politics were conducted? First, the postmodern shift of time brought on by the use of television enabled people to extend their eyes – to gain far vision and see events taking place hundreds and thousands of miles from where they lived. Because of the new medium they were able to witness the events over and over again as they were repeated on newscasts morning noon and night, day after day. The new medium simultaneously was dissociating while drawing the country together. It allowed people to both identify with the plight and interests of blacks, as well as further separate themselves, retreating

into their commonly held notions about race. Another medium, radio and stereo recording was the second aspect of the emerging postmodern impulse. Already witnessing a change in popular musical form, in terms of tempo, syncopation, rhythm and simulated sexuality, were hit from left field when politics, a secular institution in which only the elite and others who could profit were really involved, began to take over almost every genre of music. Often in a single song one's feet were made to tap, one's libido urged to hold a partner close and one's mind made to think of the rioting and looting in Los Angeles, Detroit or New York.

The third, most significant transformation was the supplanting of "the race question" and racial ideology as the prevailing discourse of the day to that simply of interests which forced a struggle between all those seeking to maintain permanence on all fronts and those forcing change. What was different is that change was not motivated by a single goal. The postmodern drive towards diffusion, dissociation and fragmentation resulted in the maintenance of those who sought permanence, but with those on the side of change segmented into their own "interest" groups – those championing civil rights, women's rights, the end of the Vietnam War, economic disenfranchisement, to mention a few issues. While the pursuit of some interests went hand-in-hand with others, it was not necessarily so. Each pursued what was in his or her best interest.

This turn to interests as the prevailing political motivation resulted in the postmodern political organization. I characterize it as postmodern because the intense drive towards organization is a struggle for permanence in pursuing one's own interest which are diverse and constantly shifting. Two important fronts are important in this regard: the forming of the Congressional Black Caucus in the U.S. Congress and the solidification of black political loyalty to the Democratic Party. When Chisolm, Louis Stokes and Clay joined the already seated black members of Congress in 1969, they constituted the greatest number of blacks seated

in that body since 1875. In the following year, four more blacks took seats in Congress bringing the total number to 13 blacks simultaneously serving. This watershed of new and *different* black leadership was significant. In the words of Clay,

*The three of us – Stokes, Chisolm, and I – came to Washington determined to seize the moment, to fight for justice, to raise issues too long ignored and too little debated. We were described by the media as militant, aggressive new leaders determined to make changes in the way black members of Congress had been viewed in the past. And we wasted no time seeking to establish a forum for articulating our concerns. (116).*

The operative words in Clay's statement here are *seize the moment*, where we find our connection again to the changing tide of race relations via the concept of time. In the postmodern world where racial ideology is shunned in the pursuit of interests, *expediency* becomes the primary *modus operandi* in the pursuit of political power. The new black leadership in Congress seized upon a new time, a changing national condition. Before looking at how this transformation from ideology to interest went beyond the realm of pursuing just black interests, an additional statement by Clay with regards to the formation of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) is informative.

*Stokes and I decided that nine of us representing such a collage of talent and experience and coming mostly from politically safe districts constituted a power bloc deserving respect within the institution. We discussed the merits of organizing a group... It was our opinion that a more formal, more structured organization based on solidarity of purpose and program would enable the nine of us to wield a significant amount of influence in the House. (117).*

For the first time in the history of the nation blacks had a solid group of black representatives who shed some of their own individual interests in pursuit of a single one that was to benefit blacks as a whole. In gerrymandered districts to remedy discrimination and the lack of representation, these new leaders were safe from potential white opposition and virtually solidified their own preservation free from challenge by other blacks. Such longevity and permanence of individual representatives resulted in increased power. But

what is most important is that all of this happened at a *time* when the public mood required and would accept this form of change. That is, "black interests" became the interest of whites and others. However, as time would tell, the pursuit of such interests by others was often a cover for seeking broader interests that would begin to come in to conflict with the general interests of blacks to some degree.

The shift from ideology to interest means the erosion of ground – that which centrally motivates one to pursue a particular course of action. Without a central ideology to dogmatically cling to one is free to change his or her actions as one's interests changes. The stalwarts of monumental Civil Rights legislation were men of high profile – presidents – Truman, Kennedy, Johnson – men who capitalized on blacks growing intolerance for being ignored by the Republican Party to whom they once looked to represent their interests. They were opportunists in a day when timing and opportunism began to become the primary political strategy of the day. The push for Civil Rights legislation by these such prominent figures and the seeming disinterest of Republicans to support such laws began a marriage of the black populace to the Democratic Party. Blacks would come to believe that they were the party who championed their interests, while at the same time such white politicians found themselves needing black votes and loyalty to gain and sustain their own power and the power of the party itself. Mendelberg (2000) makes the case that the increase in registration of black voters, especially in the South (up to sixty-five percent by 1969), and the declining support of whites of the Democratic Party resulted in the courting of African Americans by Democratic candidates who would need their votes to gain elections. And, though they were beholden to them to some degree, their outward profession of support for black interests did not eliminate Democratic candidate's continued racist feelings and need to appeal to such sentiments in white voters. In essence, many white candidates who gained black loyalty were simultaneously pursuing black interests, their own interests and that of whites whose interests ran counter to blacks.

Though Republicans have yet to gain significant amounts of support amongst blacks, the loyalty of blacks to the Democratic Party has waned. The greatest shift in party affiliation amongst blacks has over the past few years been to "independent." So, the question becomes, how could and can the Republican Party survive all these years without regaining the support of black (and other minority) constituents? The answer is that while Democrats were married to the race politics pursued by African Americans and others of its constituency, a new ideology was emerging – one that would trump the racial ideologies of the past because it moved beyond the polarizing sentiments of race. This new emerging ideology, one that Dr. Martin Luther King began to see and fight towards the end of his life, was wealth and capital. Climbing towards its peak in the present day, this ideology shifted the purposes and strategies of postmodern political organizations (particularly the Republicans) once again. What the Republicans began to see is that wealth is the primary prevailing interest. Consequently, in their politics the furtherance of minorities is not best pursued by racial strategies, but strategies of wealth. The new ideology would say that race is no longer important – that the way towards racial unity was to exploit minority interests in gaining wealth and in doing so further build their own financial and political capital, as well as gaining some political capital amongst minorities themselves. The new strategies of race, ideology and wealth are exemplified by two recent cases of prominent black Republican figures: former Congressman J.C. Watts and Secretary of State Colin Powell.

#### **J.C. WATTS: POSTER CHILD FOR THE NEW CONSERVATISM**

The political purpose of J.C. Watts was twofold. For himself, it was an opportunity to gain status and wealth. For the Republican Party it was a dual purpose to promote the illusion of racial inclusion in the party, but more importantly to diminish the role of race in support of the overarching conservative ideology of the party, which implicitly meant the pursuit of capital. From the very beginning of his first race for the 4<sup>th</sup> District

Congressional seat in Oklahoma in 1994, local and national media unwittingly supported the Republican plan. In news stories about the election that pitted him against a white, Democrat opponent (David Perryman), more than fifty percent of the time the issue of race was brought up by media outlets themselves. Generally such mention either referred to the historical fact that Watts, if elected, would be the first black congressman elected south of the Mason-Dixon line since Reconstruction, or asked the question whether a black man and a Republican could be elected in a district that was overwhelmingly white and Democrat. The media's continual focus on race allowed Watts to deny that race was of any consequence in the race. Instead, he billed the election as one centered on (Republican, conservative) values. In direct response to the question of race, Watts continually maintained, "I see myself as a Republican who happens to be black" (Daily Oklahoma, 1994, A1) In the words of one reporter, "Watts has become for his party a dramatic symbol of color-blind politics" (Plain Dealer, 1994, A1).

This color-blind stance that Watts was able to maintain and the constant racial appeals by the media drew people to the dominant ideology of wealth via race. The new strategy, at this stage of its infancy, did what race politics couldn't do. Race politics divides constituencies based on race. When the Republicans put a black face on the cover of its conservative ideology ultimately in the pursuit of wealth it raised a significant challenge given for significant appeals: white liberals could support it to some degree because it was a sign of inclusiveness and egalitarianism[2]; white conservatives (including white racists) could support it because their ultimate interest in increasing wealth was being supported; blacks (and other minorities) could begin to support the move because they could identify with his blackness; and white Democrats had little to fear because its most prominent leaders shared the same overriding ideology of wealth as the Republicans. This fact, buttressed by waning loyalty by blacks of the Democratic Party, made the move, again, a matter of good timing. For many blacks it was refreshing to see

a prominent black face in the Republican Party, although some still remained skeptical of Republican sincerity on the issue of race. What is important however is that the waning party loyalty of black democrats and the positive sentiments over the new black republicanism was generally expressed by upper-middle and upper-class blacks. In 1999, 26% of blacks viewed Watts favorably. In fact, this number was greater than the rest of the population, only 19% of whom gave him a favorable rating. However, of the blacks giving Watts a favorable rating, 64% had household incomes above \$60,000 and 36% of them had annual incomes over \$90,000 (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 1999).

A better case for the shifting role of race politics is not the heights attained by Watts, however, but how he finished his term in office. After being elevated to the highest position in the party ranks, severe tension mounted between he and other members because he suddenly began to talk about race. As he prepared to leave office Watts actively campaigned to replace himself with a minority candidate and call attention to the importance of highlighting race. When responding to questions regarding his party position as the top public relations representative, Watts had this to say: "I just wanted people to see my black face on camera" (Washington Post, 2002, A15). Watts, to some degree, began to face up to the harsh realities that in an organization and political time that put less stock in race politics, the pursuit of racial interests was used only insofar as it served as a tool to support and promote the new dominant and explicitly stated ideology of capitalism. In a related matter, about the same time as Watts' comments, new light was being thrown on two Democratic Party presidential hopefuls – Senators Joseph Lieberman and John Kerry – for their involvement in supporting, along with the majority of Republicans, legislation to protect corporate interests which they both benefited highly from. Perhaps an even greater example of the explicit emergence of wealth as a prevailing ideology insofar as race is concerned is the position held by Colin Powell.

## COLIN POWELL: RACE & THE NEW IDEOLOGY OF WEALTH

The Bush administration, perhaps more than any other has made it explicitly clear that wealth is the primary and prevailing ideology driving American domestic affairs and foreign relations. From the day he took office, Bush again played out the strategy his party predecessors had with Watts. Seizing the moment, Bush capitalized on the popularity of Colin Powell – a man who, as Watts had been, was inclined to downplay his race or racial interests. In fact, Bush went far beyond. He appointed Condoleezza Rice and began nominating other minorities to high-ranking positions in his administration. Bush made the ultimate move in terms of race politics. That is, his actions made the Republican Party the party that had appointed the most minorities to the highest positions of real political power in the history of the country – a virtual slap in the face to Democrats.

But these new representatives all shared some common characteristics. They all eschewed the machine race politics that had led many of their predecessors to political prominence. They all were appointed rather than elected. And, they all were wealthy. When Powell retired as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he made \$108,000 annually. However, his estimated wealth is at least \$27.3 million (Washington Post, 2001, A28). According to the Center for Responsive Politics, the three minority members of Bush's cabinet (Powell, Rice and Elaine Chao) have corporate interests ranging from oil to telecommunications, pharmaceuticals to defense manufacturing.

It is no wonder that the issue that stimulated the most opposition by administration officials to Powell was the initial position he took in regards to a new war with Iraq. While many will point to several reasons for the opposition, one is plainly clear. War is big business and one with Iraq, even bigger. Those within the Bush administration and those who they represent – the financial elite, especially those with oil and defense industry ties – would benefit immensely

from an Iraqi war and a prolonged "war on terror." While there is much more to this saga, the point that I believe is quite clear is that Powell's race was useful to some degree, but at the point that maintaining the image that his presence supported came into conflict with the overarching ideological pursuit of wealth, the ideology is what must be maintained.

## CONCLUSION

Time changes things. The ebb and flow of time has changed the nature of race from a fixed ideological construct. It has replaced the prevailing ideology of race with the pursuit of the endless multitude and diffusion of interests manifested in a system of race politics. It has introduced a countervailing ideology to replace the initial permanence of racial ideology. In the postmodern political organization time has not excluded either of these from the field of play. Each avenue of politics is permanently simultaneously dynamic, yet for the immediate present, the new prevailing ideology of capital threatens to do greater damage than racial ideology ever has. Wealth and the pursuit of it now trumps all other factors. If you work hard, and play by the rules anyone, despite their race, can achieve what they will. This is the illusion of inclusion pervasive in the current political time. Yet, it is increasingly true that this statement is only true for those who have or have access to that which all others seek, the almighty dollar and guarantees that a few, despite some racial diversity in their makeup, will be thrust ahead all others.

## NOTES

[1] My use of the contrast between the European and African here and throughout the paper is not meant to ignore the complexities involved in the multitude of other non-European groups. I take W.E.B. DuBois' position, however that racial issues are marked by a color line – one that the European-African contrast exemplifies.

[2] Mendelberg (2000) emphasizes that what changed between the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the Civil Rights era was a new norm of equality. That is, whether individuals (mainly white) were or not, it became the prevailing motivation to at least appear as supporting racial equality. Political strategies and rhetoric were devised that supported this belief both for individuals themselves and the wider

public.

[3] Statement by Abraham Lincoln, originally cited in the New York Times, 1989 - should be (cited in Clay, 1996, p. 3)

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