

Closing the Black Voter Gap to Build Multi-Racial Power

Next year will be two decades since Barack Obama told the Democratic National Convention in Boston that we are One America. It will mark 40 years since Rev. Jesse Jackson launched his first of two *Rainbow Coalition* campaigns, stunning the establishment and winning 11 primary contests in 1988. Both insurgencies energized and mobilized Black voters to historic levels. Less well remembered is the white support both campaigns captured -



not only from liberals, but from factory workers, family farmers and millions of ordinary middle-class white voters willing to get behind a Black leader with a populist agenda well to the left of their establishment rivals.



The political dynamics and demographic trends that allowed Obama to overcome many of the same obstacles and dirty tricks thrown at Jackson 20 earlier have only progressed and solidified the pivotal role of Black political power in winning and sustaining a multi-racial American majority.

Unfortunately, too many experts and many white candidates – including those who are from moderate, to liberal, to left – continue to draw entirely wrong and contradictory lessons. They will acknowledge, even praise, the pivotal role of Black voters while simultaneously sidelining or running as fast as they can away from them or any real issues that they care about.

This is partly based on a false, and inherently racist assumption that whites can lead Blacks, but Blacks can't lead whites - or can't lead enough to win. This fiction still dominates American liberal orthodoxy despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary since Obama's 2008 win¹ and as dozens of Black Members of Congress have broken through in majority white districts². It also comes from an obsolete and essentially segregationist view of African Americans as almost exclusively inner-city dwellers with a limited set of "urban" concerns unrelated to or in conflict with the interests of white and other middle- and working-class suburban voters.

The Summit for Civil Rights Coalition³ will present an analysis and make a case for a significant investment in a unified approach to building multi racial working-class political power by centralizing the role of Black institutions, leaders, voters, and workers – and thus Black power –when organizing at the metropolitan level, in congressional districts, and even statewide.

¹ In 2008, Obama significantly increased his share and turnout of Black voters while winning essentially the same percentage of white voters, including white working-class voters. Obama did as well or better than previous similar candidates (Al Gore and Bill Clinton) among white working class voters, winning a majority in many Northeastern and Midwestern battle ground states. <https://www.politico.com/story/2008/11/exit-polls-how-obama-won-015297> <https://workingclassstudies.wordpress.com/2008/12/15/the-white-working-class-vote-in-2008/>

² In 2015, there were only two members of the Congressional Black Caucus representing majority white districts; by 2018, that number grew to 13. At almost 60 members, Black representation in the U. S. Congress has nearly doubled since 2000. U.S. [Congress continues to grow in racial, ethnic diversity](#)

³ This Coalition includes some of America's top political strategists (Stono Public Affairs), the Ohio Unity Coalition, the Coalition of Black Trades Unionists (CBTU), the Institute for Metropolitan Opportunity (IMO), Building One America (BOA) and array of experts in faith based organizing and civil rights law and advocacy.

Our challenge to the status quo approach is not a moral one as much as one based on an understanding of important demographic and political trends of race, geography, and class that argue for an effective strategy that *centers on* Black political leaders, voters, and issues rather than sidelining or silencing them.

Three major factors argue for this new direction in building multi-racial working-class power:

1. There is a large Black voter gap.

Out of the nearly 9 million “missing” but eligible Black voters, nearly half are the “missing voters” who showed up in 2008 and 2012 to vote for a Black presidential candidate but not 2016 or 2022.

2. Black voters are increasingly suburban⁴

*More than half of all Black eligible voters today live outside of central cities, mostly in diverse suburbs.*⁵

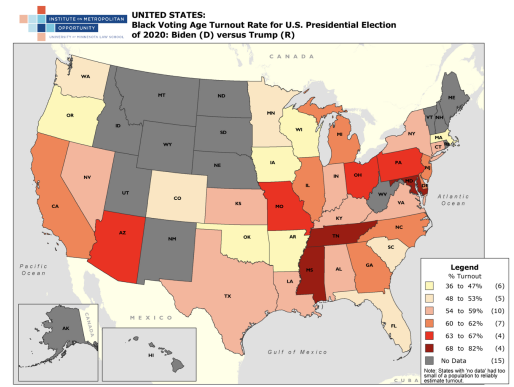
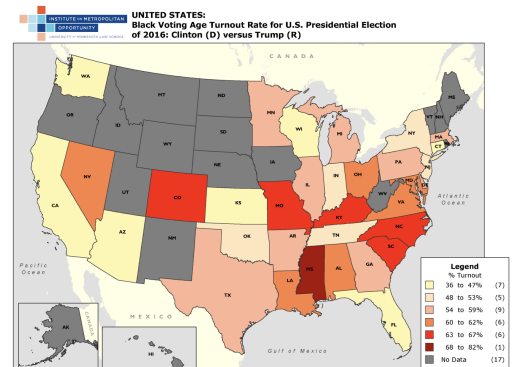
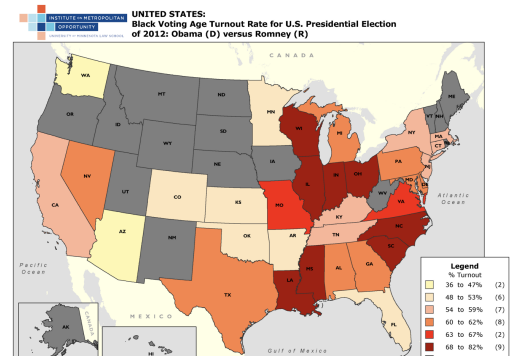
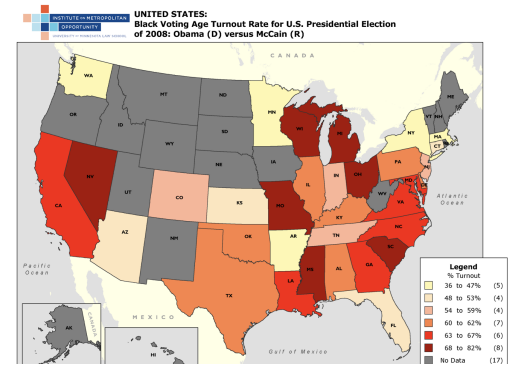
3. Many Suburban Blacks are not voting.

In many states (especially North and Midwest) suburban Black registration and turnout is lower (in some cases significantly lower) than among urban Black voters.

The **Summit for Civil Rights Coalition**⁶(described below) proposes to deepen its analysis and develop a comprehensive strategy for closing this dangerous power gap in America. The analysis and strategy is being presented at the *Summit for Civil Rights* on September 28-29, 2023 as part of a broader movement of *Reclaiming Populism: Reviving the Tripartite Alliance of Labor, Civil Rights, and the Black Church*.

Key elements of this strategy include:

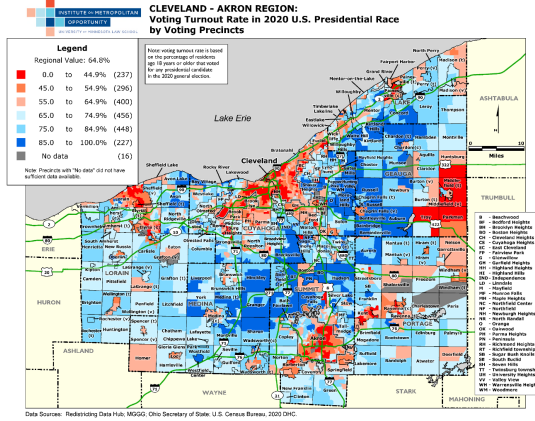
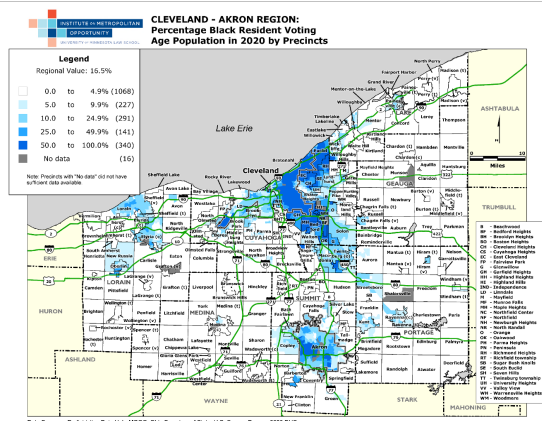
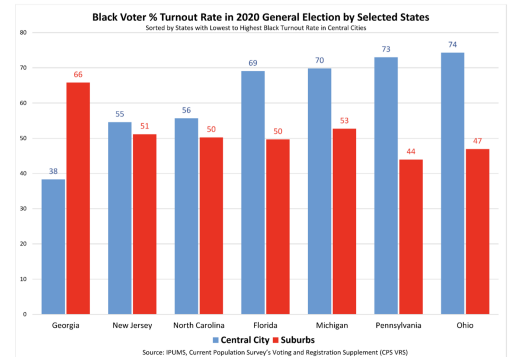
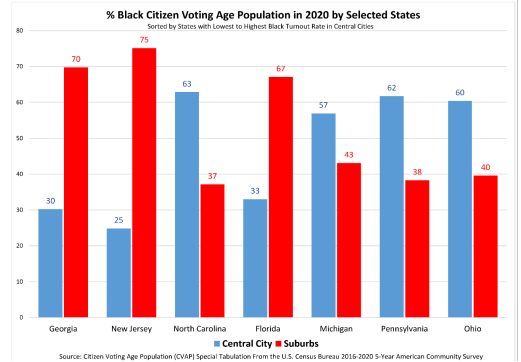
1. An initial national demographic and political analysis conducted to examine Black electoral behavior, including numbers and percentages of Black voters in cities and suburbs and across states and districts, as well as registered and unregistered eligible voters, and active and inactive voters.
2. Initial data is used to identify states, regions and/or districts where the Black suburban vote is underperforming and where that Black vote gap is significant enough to be decisive in state and national contests.



⁴ More than half of all minority groups in large metro areas, including Blacks, now reside in the suburbs. The share of blacks in large metro areas living in suburbs rose from 37 percent in 1990, to 44 percent in 2000, to 51 percent in 2010. Higher shares of whites (78 percent), Asians (62 percent), and Hispanics (59 percent) in large metro areas live in suburbs. This trend has continued in the 2020 census. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0504_census_ethnicity_frey.pdf

⁵ Black population in most central cities is declining. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/09/black-families-leaving-cities-suburbs/671331/>

3. A deepened analysis to pinpoint and map out communities and census tracts and precincts within regions where there are concentrations of underperforming Black voters and eligible potential voters.
4. Identification of and mapping regional and national networks that can reach Black voters in regions where a significant gap exists. This will include Black churches, labor unions (e.g. CBTU relationships), civil rights organizations, fraternities and sororities and related associations and networks.
5. An overlay of additional demographic data including fiscal, racial, and social dynamics and trends of targeted regions and states to better inform issues and characteristics of the target population.
6. Identification, recruitment, and training of leaders of target institutions (e.g. pastors, labor leaders, local electeds) to create a team (*Tripartite Alliance Cadre*) to drive the campaign in each region / state.
7. Development of goals and execution of a plan for registration and turnout for each region aimed at target demographics using professional GOTV practices while fully leveraging networks and leaders from faith, civil rights, local electeds and unions recruited to drive the program.



6 The Summit for Civil Rights Coalition Partners include the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), the AFL-CIO A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI) AFL CIO, Building One America (BOA), the University of Minnesota Law School, the Institute for Metropolitan Opportunity (IMO), Rutgers University Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations (LSER),

Georgetown University Law Center, the Workers Center at GULC, and Cleveland State University. Supporting sponsors have included AFL-CIO, AFSCME / OAPSE Local 4, American Federation of Teachers (AFT), American Postal Workers Union (APWU), Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC), Communications Workers of America (CWA), Copper Levinson, Cozen O'Connor, Ford Foundation, Hofstra University, HPAE, International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART), International Brotherhood of Carpenters (IBC), International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), International Longshoremens Association, International Union of Operating Engineers Local 68, Iron Workers 399, Local 194 IPFTE, Metal Trades Department of the AFL-CIO, National Educators Association (NEA), National Fair Housing Alliance, New York State AFL-CIO, Ohio Educators Association, Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 9, Rutgers CURE, United Auto Workers Union (UAW), United Steel Workers (USW), and the University of Minnesota Law School - Law & Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice.

Summit speakers included House Majority Whip James E. Clyburn, House Committee on Education and Labor Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, North America's Building Trades Union President Sean McGarvey, NEA President Becky Pringle, NAACP President Derrick Johnson, USW Vice President Fred Redmond, Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, Vice President Walter Mondale, AME Bishop Reginald T. Jackson, NAACP Legal Defense Fund President Sherrilyn Ifill, AFT President Randi Weingarten, Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, Congresswoman Barbara Lee, Beverly D. Tatum, Professors Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, John A. Powell, Sheryll Cashin, William E. Spriggs, John C. Brittain, Barbara Ransby, John H. Bracey, Jr., Julian Vasquez Heilig, Mark G. Pearce, Theodore M. Shaw, Stella Flores, Rev. Willie Francois, Richard Rothstein, Author Eric Foner, Michelle Burris, Alexander Polikoff, Bruce D. Haynes, David P. Rusk, Elizabeth Powell, Prentiss Dantzler, Gary Orfield, Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, Myron Orfield, William P. Jones, Douglas Massey, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Rucker Johnson, Marc Bayard, Amy Wells, Tiffani Torres, Betsey Julian, CBTU President Rev. Terrance Melvin, Lisa Rice, Paul Jargowsky, Clayola Brown, Algernon Austin, Stefan Lallinger, Nikole Hannah Jones, Valerie Jarrett, Ray LaHood, and Rep. Steve LaTourette.