

# Can The GOP Up The Ante?

SOME POLITICAL SCHOLARS CHALLENGE THE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S  
QUEST FOR BLACK AND LATINO VOTERS

BY KENDRA HAMILTON

When Colin Powell took the podium at the 2000 GOP national convention, his words of apparent reconciliation — “The party must follow (Gov. Bush’s) lead in reaching out to minority communities, and particularly the African American community, and not just during an election-year campaign” — seemed to signal a cease-fire in the party’s hotly waged “cultural war for the soul of America.”

But four years later, with convention “stars” like former Oklahoma Congressman J.C. Watts retired from public life, the rhetoric of “reaching out” receding into distant memory and conservative columnists like George Will writing about the “futility ... of asking African Americans to vote for any Republican, regardless of his views or record,” political observers say the GOP seems poised to place a “Latinos only” sign on its big tent.

“I don’t think I agree,” says Pamela Mantis, deputy press secretary for the Republican National Committee. “Being inside the RNC as a woman of color — as a Black and Hispanic female — I see a serious effort to gain the African American vote. We haven’t done a good job in the past, but we are com-

mitted. We are asking for votes.”

But Dr. Ronald Walters doesn’t see the commitment. A professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland, director of the African American Leadership Institute and author of the newly released *White Nationalism, Black Interests: Conservative Public Policy and the Black Community*, Walters says he sees “somewhat of a difference” in the treatment of Hispanic voters. “I don’t see any difference in the Republican approach so far (of ignoring) African American voters,” he adds.

Dr. Gary Segura, associate professor of American politics at the University of Iowa and a nationally renowned expert on congressional elections and the mobilization of minority voters, is even more em-



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— Dr. Gary Segura, Associate Professor of American Politics, University of Iowa

President George W. Bush and the Republican Party have to find new ways to woo the Black American vote, say political scientists.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HUD

phatic in his assessment. "As ugly as it sounds, I would bet a million dollars that (writing off the Black vote) is exactly what the GOP does," he says.

Latino voters, on the other hand, will probably continue to be courted with displays of "friendliness" and "acceptance."

"Here's the key," adds Dr. Larry Sabato, the Robert Kent Gooch professor of politics at the University of Virginia, founder and director of the Center for Politics and political commentator. "Elections are won at the margins, so (the Republican Party's) goal is not to change any group radically. It's to increase Bush's percentages by 2 percent, 3 percent, 4 percent, 5 percent, 6 percent, maybe even 7 percent for 2004.

"Some groups are more 'pliable' than others. For instance, (Republicans) stand a better chance to increase the percentage of the Hispanic vote. And people say, 'Gee, that would mean that Democrats continue to get 85 percent of the African American vote.' And that's true, but (a large enough) additional increment (of Hispanics) is enough to win a close election," Sabato says.

The question is, does the strategy of targeting a "pliable" electorate amount to a divide-and-conquer tactic aimed at warding off the threat of a Black-Latino coalition that swings to the left? One might

look to history for clues.

Few people know that, in tandem with the "Southern strategy" that effectively transferred the White South to GOP hands beginning with the 1968 election, President Richard Nixon also pioneered a "Hispanic strategy" in 1972, notes Dr. Luis Fraga, an associate professor of political science at Stanford

University and prominent commentator who's currently serving as a fellow at Harvard's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

"Nixon established the Commission of Hispanic Affairs; he had a high-level presidential adviser on Hispanic affairs; there were attempts to make explicit appeals, particularly in California and Texas," Fraga explains. "There are even some who argue — though I don't think there's a defin-

itive case to be made — that the use of 'Hispanic' at that time by the Republican Party was tied to an effort to put together a pan-ethnic, pan-Latino coalition of support for the party."

Mantis, however, discounts the possibility that the Hispanic strategy amounted to a divide-and-conquer strategy for the GOP. "Nixon also had an African American strategy," she says.

What Walters called a "spectacle of minorities" at the 2000 GOP convention, Mantis describes as a genuine attempt to counter the party's "image problem."

### 2004 Presidential Race

In general, do you think the policies of the Bush administration favor the rich, favor the middle class, favor the poor, or do they treat all groups the same?

Date	Rich	Middle Class	Poor	All the Same	Don't Know
11/03	63%	9%	1%	23%	4%
9-10/03	60%	10%	1%	26%	3%
5/03	54%	14%	3%	22%	7%
1/03	58%	10%	1%	26%	5%

SOURCE: CBS NEWS POLL, NOV. 10-12, 2003. N = 1,000 ADULTS NATIONWIDE. MOE + - 3. WWW.POLLINGREPORT.COM/BUSH.HTM

“We are not all White guys with bow ties,” Mantis says. “And though I can’t speak for the president and the White House, I know he believes in diversity.”

Some observers agree.

“What the president did in 2000 that I found so intriguing was, he became the first major national presidential candidate ever to make Hispanics his ‘preferred’ ethnic/racial group,” Fraga says. “That is, to make it very clear that when he talked about race and ethnicity and racial inclusion and the need for the country to come together, he was placing Hispanics, particularly people of Mexican origin, front and center of his experience, knowledge and background. That was, in my view, something new that had never happened before.”

In Bush’s case, given his experiences in Texas and his oft-professed love for his niece and nephews, Fraga believes the emotion that drives the appeals is probably genuine. The party’s agenda, on the other hand, may be another matter.

“Republican Party operatives often ask, ‘What can we do to attract the (minority) vote?’ The interesting thing is that they only want to do symbolism — they don’t want to change public policy in order to appeal to those voters,” Walters says.

But “symbolic appeals are not in any way perceived as meaningful by African Americans, as every poll that anyone has conducted has consistently shown,” Fraga says. President Bush, for example, managed to draw only 9 percent of the African American vote in 2000 — and little has happened since then to create a positive change for the Republican Party.

“What are they going to claim?” Segura asks. “The No Child Left Behind Act? Well, it wasn’t funded so that’s a policy failure not a success. The

civil rights record of the administration? You certainly wouldn’t want to be highlighting the administration’s intervention in the Michigan cases.”

Mantis emphatically disputes the assessment of the No Child Left Behind Act. “That is a myth — the act is not unfunded,” she says. And while essentially conceding the point on the Michigan cases, Mantis offers Bush’s strong support for historically Black universities, an initiative to increase home-ownership rates among minorities and the efforts of the nation’s small business disadvantage offices as evidence that there is something concrete on the table for people of color.

On the other hand, symbolic appeals appear to be viewed a bit more positively by Latino voters. They tend to vote 2-to-1 in favor of Democrats, according to Fraga, well below the 8-to-2 margin Democrats enjoy among African Americans.

“This is the strategic advantage that Republicans enjoy,” Segura explains. “Because the GOP loses so many minority voters, the attempt to appeal to them, even if it’s simple pandering — like Bush’s hint that he’ll reach an amnesty deal with (Mexico’s President Vicente) Fox, using Spanish in a speech or having giant sombrero-clad Mexicans at the convention — looks good. It’s just pandering, but even pandering from a party with a historically bad reputation on reaching out to minorities looks good.”

Still, Segura points out, very little has come of Bush’s promises of Latino inclusion. For example, hints that an amnesty deal for undocumented workers was in the offing dissolved in the face of opposition from within the Republican Party even before the Sept. 11 tragedy.

“The fact that (the Republicans) didn’t pursue the promises that they made, I think, is going to come back to haunt them. I don’t think Bush will do as well among Latinos in 2004 as he did in 2000,” Segura says.

But Fraga isn’t even convinced that Latinos are the intended audience for these symbolic appeals. Indeed, he argues that moderate suburban voters — particularly moderate suburban women — are the eyes and ears these appeals are intended to reach.

In the last presidential election, Fraga says, there were only two states in which the Hispanic vote was critical to the margin of victory: New Mexico, which went to Vice President Al Gore, and Florida, where the result is still unknown. By comparison, the African American vote swung five states into Gore’s column: Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Illinois and Michigan.

“So you compare five to two, and you wonder,



Dr. Luis Fraga, Associate Professor, Political Science, Stanford University

## 2004 Presidential Race

■ Do you have confidence in George W. Bush’s ability to deal wisely with an international crisis, or are you uneasy about his approach?

Date	Have Confidence	Uneasy	Don’t Know
9-10/03	45%	50%	5%
4/03	66%	31%	3%
3/03	55%	42%	4%
11/02	53%	43%	5%
6/01	42%	52%	6%
4/23-25/01	47%	47%	6%
4/4-5/01	48%	46%	6%
3/01	52%	40%	7%
2/01	43%	45%	12%

■ Do you have confidence in George W. Bush’s ability to make the right decisions about the nation’s economy, or are you uneasy about his approach?

Date	Have Confidence	Uneasy	Don’t Know
9-10/03	40%	56%	4%
5/03	47%	49%	4%
4/03	54%	42%	4%
1/03	47%	50%	2%
11/02	47%	48%	5%

SOURCE: CBS NEWS/NEW YORK TIMES POLL, SEPT. 28-OCT. 1, 2003.  
N = 981 ADULTS NATIONWIDE. MOE + - 3.  
WWW.POLLINGREPORT.COM/BUSH.HTM

## The Shape of Things to Come: An Emerging Latino-Black Coalition?

According to an analysis by Dr. Ron Walters of the University of Maryland these 13 states account for 242 electoral votes — 45 percent of the total.



New Mexico	1.9% Black	42.1% Latino	44% Total
Texas	11.5% Black	32% Latino	43.7% Total
California	6.7% Black	32.4% Latino	39.1% Total
Mississippi	36.3% Black	1.4% Latino	37.7% Total
Louisiana	32.5% Black	2.4% Latino	34.9% Total
Georgia	28.7% Black	5.3% Latino	34% Total
Maryland	27.9% Black	4.3% Latino	32.2% Total
South Carolina	29.5% Black	2.4% Latino	31.9% Total
Florida	14.6% Black	16.8% Latino	31.4% Total
New York	15.9% Black	15.1% Latino	31% Total
Alabama	26% Black	1.7% Latino	27.7% Total
Illinois	15.1% Black	12.3% Latino	27.4% Total
New Jersey	13.6% Black	13.3% Latino	26.9 Total

SOURCE: U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

“What is the Republican Party doing?” Fraga says. “And that’s why I make the argument that, by appealing to Hispanics, the president can soften his social conservative image and make himself more credible with moderate, independent, White voters” who were repelled by the rhetoric of “cultural war” and “religious war.”

By any measure, the Republican Party appears to be engaged in a delicate balancing act. Having worked for two-and-a-half decades to mobilize the anger of social conservatives and “angry White men” — there are significant risks in seeming to seek the votes of people of color too actively.

Fraga concurs. “The most reliable and critical base of support for maintaining the national competitiveness of the Republican Party is the White South. That’s the foundation.” So the party will likely steer clear of positions that might alienate White voters and continue to craft appeals to minorities on the basis of what Fraga calls “symbolic mainstreaming.”

“That means an explicit attempt to make communities of color central to their campaigns, but the appeals that are made to those communities will have very little to do with specific policy positions,” Fraga explains. “There will be a politics of symbolism based on prominent individuals and clear and, I think, genuine demonstrations of respect for Spanish language and for elements, if you will, of Latino culture,” but no more than that.

The question is, will those appeals be sufficient, particularly at a time when the numbers of African

Americans and Latino Americans are approaching or are more than a third of the total population in 13 states?

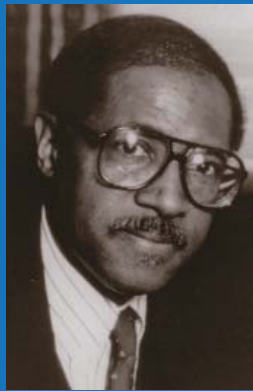
“The striking thing about this in terms of potential coalition politics is that these 13 states represent 242 electoral votes, 45 percent of the total,” Walters explains. “There are a lot of possibilities, but it is a fact that White voters are declining (as a percentage of the total) over time. In the not too distant future, Blacks and Hispanics will have the opportunity to leverage the election of public officials from president to senator to governor.”



Dr. Larry Sabato, Director,  
Center of Politics,  
University of Virginia

As for the 2004 presidential election, observers say, it’s far too early to tell what will happen. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will play a role, as will the economy — though exactly what role remains in doubt. Mantis is quite clear that the RNC will continue its efforts to make inroads among ethnic and racial minorities. Citing a 1999 survey by Black America’s Political Action Committee (BAMPAC), a conservative-leaning organization, that showed that 47 percent of African Americans felt the Democratic Party was taking them for granted and that the number of registered independents among them had risen to around 30 percent, she says, “The RNC sees the power of the African American and the Latino vote. That’s why it’s important to engage them. We want to have them on our side.”

Thus the RNC will continue its efforts to recruit



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— Dr. Ron Walters, Professor, Government and Politics, University of Maryland, Director, African American Leadership Institute

## Ideology by Demographic Subgroups

Based on Gallup Polls Conducted in October and November 2003

	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	N=
Total	41%	39%	19%	4,036
Men	44%	39%	16%	1,928
Women	39%	39%	21%	2,108
Approve of Bush	55%	35%	9%	2,194
Disapprove of Bush	23%	44%	32%	1,689
East	35%	43%	22%	919
Midwest	44%	37%	18%	933
South	44%	38%	18%	1,293
West	40%	39%	19%	888
Whites	43%	38%	18%	3,175
Blacks	30%	47%	22%	440
White Easterners	36%	44%	20%	764
White Midwesterners	44%	38%	17%	822
White Southerners	49%	33%	17%	989
White Westerners	43%	37%	20%	668
High school diploma or less	42%	41%	16%	1,573
Some college education	45%	37%	18%	1,316
College graduate	39%	39%	21%	557
Postgraduate education	31%	41%	28%	577
Republicans	70%	26%	4%	1,307
Independents	29%	47%	22%	1,521
Democrats	25%	43%	31%	1,193
18- to 29-year-olds	32%	40%	27%	762
30- to 49-year-olds	42%	39%	19%	1,625
50- to 64-year-olds	42%	40%	18%	901
65 years and older	47%	40%	11%	719
18- to 38-years-old	35%	39%	25%	1,216
39- to 57-years-old	40%	40%	20%	1,592
58 years and older	47%	39%	14%	1,226
Men, aged 18 to 49	42%	39%	18%	1,180
Men, aged 50 and older	46%	40%	13%	739
Women, aged 18 to 49	35%	39%	25%	1,209
Women, aged 50 and older	43%	40%	17%	881
Less than \$20,000 per year	36%	42%	21%	562
\$20,000-\$29,999 per year	38%	43%	19%	591
\$30,000-\$49,999 per year	40%	40%	19%	1,066
\$50,000-\$74,999 per year	46%	38%	17%	686
\$75,000 per year and more	42%	37%	21%	909
White Republicans	64%	31%	5%	1,698
White Democrats	20%	44%	36%	1,282
Black Democrats	27%	49%	24%	238

SOURCE: GALLUP

and train African Americans and Latinos to run for office, she adds — despite the odds. For that same BAMPAC survey noted that 72 percent of African Americans continue to have an unfavorable impression of the Republican Party.

“What is the GOP coalition?” Segura asks. “It’s built around riches, religion and racism. It’s built around the monied classes who’ve benefited tremendously by the emptying of the federal treasury into their pockets. It’s built around the racism of White Southerners, which means that as long as the GOP is the party of ‘we don’t give anything to Blacks,’ the White Bubbas will vote for Bush. And it’s built on Jesus.”

Segura was even willing to make a prediction. “If the economy stays poor — it’s showing signs of life now — but if it’s March or April and things still don’t look good, and the war in Iraq is still in meltdown, you have to figure Bush can’t run on his international record and he can’t run on his domestic record. So the campaign will have to be run almost entirely on racial code words and no gay marriage. It’s going to be ugly, ugly. That’s my prediction,” Segura says.

Indeed, Segura’s words appear to have been prescient. Just days after his prediction, the Massachusetts Supreme Court rejected a same-sex marriage ban, sparking angry denunciations from social conservatives. ■