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In order to win elections going forward, progressives must run towards People of Color, not away from them.

The United States is in the final stages of a profound demographic revolution. This transformation in the composition of our population has potentially far-reaching implications for our communities, economy, government, politics, and society as a whole. Over the next couple decades we have the opportunity to move from a country dominated by a relative handful of wealthy White men to a multi-racial, interdependent, and productive democracy.

With change comes anxiety, however, and the psychological and emotional dynamics of this change are coming to dominate our political discourse. How we face the future will go a long way towards determining whether the demographic revolution further divides us as a nation or brings us together to produce a harmonious, robust, rich, and rewarding nation.

The Right Wing seeks to exploit fear and anxiety about the population shifts. They prey on stereotypes and disinformation to foment the feeling that “the America we knew” is slipping away. Their solutions tend towards locking up Black people and deporting Brown people, cloaked in language of “law and order” and “enforcing our borders” (conveniently ignoring the fact that these borders were violently imposed through wars, death, and destruction).

Too may liberals and Democrats, however, choose to hide their heads in the sand and ignore the demographic realities. They seem to hope that if they just say nothing, then they’ll be able to avoid a racial backlash that will send swing voters rushing into the arms of the conservatives. We believe this approach is dead wrong. In order to win elections going forward, progressives must run towards People of Color, not away from them.

And, really, there’s nothing to be afraid of. We don’t bite (okay, Mike Tyson does, but he’s an anomaly). People of Color share the same values, aspirations, hopes and dreams as everyone else -- a caring community, excellent schools, economic security, dignified housing, and a fair and level playing field that allows everyone the opportunity to pursue their dreams and achieve their potential. At this stage of the game, we’re all in this together, and together, we can build the kind of country we all want to live in.
We believe, that there is a new electoral majority in America.

The composition of America has changed. The results of the 2010 Census confirmed what is becoming increasingly evident in ways both big and small – People of Color are rapidly approaching majority status in the United States. The total U.S. population in 2010 was 308,745,538 people. In 1990, People of Color comprised 24% of the country’s population. As of 2010, that number had grown to 36%, or 112,074,630 million people.

Some of our Best Friends are White

Less noticed in media commentary and political analysis is the number of Whites who have stood in solidarity with People of Color. Whether you call them progressives, People of Color allies, or just Democratic-leaning voters, the numbers are substantial, and, when combined with People of Color, decisive.

There are 196.7 million White people in America. The most consistent gauge of the political sentiments of White Americans can be found in national exit polls. As the table below illustrates, from 34% to 43% of Whites have voted Democratic historically.
Averaged together over the last nine Presidential elections over 34 years, 40.78% of Whites have voted Democratic. 40.78% of the White population is 80,202,396 people. That number, added to the number of People of Color is 192,277,066, or 62% of the total population. A clear majority.
No, Not All People of Color are Progressive.

Any Person of Color who’s ever had a Thanksgiving or holiday discussion with their relatives can confirm that not all People of Color are progressive. In elections, however, People of Color have fairly consistently voted Democratic. The following table shows the data from elections over the past 14 years.

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>54%</td>
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2008 & 2010: The Proof of the Pudding is in the Eating¹

Whatever proverb or Middle English phrase one chooses, everyone can agree that it is indeed results that count. And the results of the 2008 and 2010 elections proved, conclusively, we believe, that there is a new electoral majority in America.

2008: Yes We Can

Sometimes lost in the euphoria of Barack Obama’s election is a proper appreciation of the nature of the electoral coalition that propelled him to his historic victory. By winning sizable majorities of voters of color (and overwhelming percentages of African Americans) plus a meaningful minority of white voters, Obama trounced John McCain across the country. Of particular significance to the future of U.S. politics was Obama’s performance in the South and Southwest, the fastest growing areas of the country.

Whereas the “battleground” states have traditionally been seen as the industrial Midwest (with Florida and Colorado thrown in for good measure), Obama rode the demographic wave to expand the electoral map to areas Democrats had previously feared to tread. In the South, Obama became the first Democrat since Lyndon Johnson in 1964 to win Virginia and the first since Jimmy Carter in 1976 to win North Carolina. In the Southwest, Obama did what Kerry and Gore couldn’t do in winning Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico (Gore won New Mexico by 366 votes but lost Colorado and Nevada).

¹ People often now say, “the proof is in the pudding” (which doesn’t really make sense, if you think about it). The correct usage is as above. Here’s the explanation: “Perhaps it’s a sign of our increasingly fast-paced, short-attention-span society that even our old proverbs are being shortened and clipped down from the original full sayings. Word Detective and other etymology sites pointed out that the phrase originated as ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating.’ It means that the true value or quality of something can only be judged when it’s put to use. The meaning is often summed up as ‘results are what count.’

According to Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations, the phrase dates back to at least 1615 when Miguel de Cervantes published Don Quixote. In this comic novel, the phrase is stated as, “The proof of the pudding is the eating.” [http://ask.yahoo.com/20020903.html](http://ask.yahoo.com/20020903.html)
Even in Georgia, a state Obama didn’t win, he still scored an impressive 47% of the vote, coming closer than any Democrat since Bill Clinton in 1996.

2010 – Red Tide Rolling. . .to a point

In 2010, Republicans racked up widespread victories seemingly everywhere – except in three states where three of the most vulnerable incumbent Democratic Senators withstood the conservative tidal wave. In Colorado, Nevada, and California, Senators Bennett, Reid, and Boxer all lost the White vote, but won re-election by demonstrating that victory is possible with a coalition of People of Color and progressive Whites. The precise composition of the electorate in each of those 3 states varied, with Colorado having the smallest number of voters of color, 19% of the state’s voters.

Using Colorado as a baseline (Nevada had 29% voters of color and California had 39%), the implications for such an electoral equation are profound for the future of American politics. There are 24 states where 19% of the voters are People of Color, and those states have 351 electoral votes (it takes 270 to elect a President) and 303 House of Representative seats (218 seats is a majority).
Over the past forty years, large numbers of People of Color have begun to acquire meaningful wealth.

For years, conventional wisdom has held that People of Color have no money to speak of (this is a view held by White people and People of Color alike). Steve’s mother used to use the phrase, “he doesn’t have a pot to pee in or a window to throw it out of.” Friends say things like, “I’m so broke I can’t pay attention.” Over the past forty years, however, something has happened in America.

Quantitatively, there are now more economically successful People of Color than at any previous time in U.S. history. Hundreds of thousands of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans are now lawyers, professors, doctors, business people, entrepreneurs, non-profit executives, and other kinds of professionals. The children of the civil rights movement have truly come of age.

The potential power of these successful families can best be appreciated when considered in comparison to the kind of donor base necessary to elect a President of the United States. It is universally acknowledged that, in 2008, Barack Obama had the largest number of donors of any Presidential candidate in history, approximately three million people. 75% of Obama’s money, however, came from 580,000 people who gave more than $200. Using that 580,000 person number as a benchmark then, the potential power of successful People of Color quickly becomes clear. According to the 2010 Census, there are 1.4 million Black households, 1.5 million Latino households, and 1.5 million Asian American households with incomes of more than $100k/year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TOTAL WHITE</th>
<th>PROG WHITE</th>
<th>BLACK</th>
<th>HISPANIC</th>
<th>ASIAN</th>
<th>TOTAL POC + PROG. WHITES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Households</td>
<td>95,000,000</td>
<td>38,000,000</td>
<td>14,730,000</td>
<td>13,298,000</td>
<td>4,687,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% over $100k</td>
<td>21.00%</td>
<td>21.00%</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
<td>11.70%</td>
<td>32.40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number over $100k</td>
<td>19,950,000</td>
<td>7,980,000</td>
<td>1,369,890</td>
<td>1,555,866</td>
<td>1,518,588</td>
<td>12,424,344</td>
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2 http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0690.pdf
The truly dominant potential of the New American Majority can be seen when you factor in the partnership of progressive Whites. Assuming that the 40% of Whites who vote Democratic are equally distributed across the income spectrum, that would add another 7.9 million households with six-figure incomes to the pool of potential supporters.

Roughly twelve million households, then, have six-figure incomes and are either People of Color or progressive Whites. If just 5% of those twelve million households banded together, they would exceed the number of donors necessary to elect the President. We need be powerless no more. The hands that once picked cotton and grapes and pineapple can now truly pick Presidents.

1 In fact, there is reason to believe that there is a higher percentage of Whites in $100k households than in the population at large, given that Obama received 52% of the votes of people making more than $200k/yr (http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#val=USP00p1). But, for these purposes, we'll stick with the more conservative number of 40%.
There is shockingly little investment in the growing areas of opportunity in the South and Southwest.

There has been a lot of attention paid recently to the proliferation of money in politics, and rightly so. The implication, however, that Democrats lost badly in 2010 largely because we were outspent by conservative and corporate donors is incorrect. Democrats don’t have a spending gap; what we have is a strategy gap.

Democrats lost so badly in 2010 not because the voters rejected President Obama’s policies and swung to the right. Democrats lost so badly in 2010 because too many of the voters who elected President Obama in 2008 stayed home in 2010. Just one-third of the eligible Latino voters turned out in 2010, as opposed to 49% of White voters.

Every two year election cycle, Democrats and progressives spend more than $2 billion. Republicans roughly spend the same amount. While SuperPACs gave Republicans a slight monetary advantage in 2010, Democrats should have a significant demographic advantage, as described above. The problem is that much of the money on the Democratic side is not spent in a scientific and strategic fashion that builds on our structural demographic advantages. Democrats have three fundamental problems:

1. They’re spending too much money in the wrong places;
2. They’re spending too much money in the wrong ways; and
3. They’re giving too much money to the wrong people

Wrong Places

Too many Democratic strategists are painfully ignorant (or dismissive) of population shifts and the electoral implications thereof. The following map shows the geographic redistribution of electoral college votes based on the population changes over the past decade.
Despite the clear, incontrovertible evidence that the South and Southwest are “where the action is,” progressive and Democratic operatives still craft their strategies and run their campaigns on a map that was designed for a different era. As the following graphics show, there is far too little investment in the growing areas of opportunity in the South and Southwest.

As we learned in 2009, it's not enough to just elect an awesome President. So long as Congress is dominated by conservative politicians (Democratic and Republican), we will never be able to enact a policy agenda that expresses our highest and best ideals. The added strategic benefit of focusing on areas of demographic transformation is that not only can you elect more People of Color and progressives, but you can also cut the conservative movement off at the knees by depriving them of their electoral base of power. As places like Orange County, California trend brown, you not only lay the foundation for a Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez, but you take out ultra-right wing pols like “B-1 Bob” Dornan.

Texas, of George Bush and Rick Perry fame, is now a majority People of Color (55%). Georgia, which gave us Newt Gingrich, is 44% People of Color, and Obama got 47% of the vote in Georgia in the 2008 election. John McCain and Jan Brewer’s home state of Arizona is 42% People of Color, and Obama is competitive in 2012 polling match-ups in Arizona against his Republican opponent. Once progressives get the upper hand in these states, the Right Wing will have nowhere left to hide.

Spending Money in the Wrong Ways

Too many Democratic campaigns suffer from a failure of imagination and creativity about how to communicate with and engage a diverse electorate. As one top Democratic strategist said when asked about his plans for reaching out to voters of color, “they watch the same commercials everybody else does.” That type of narrow focus is unfortunately more the norm than the exception. The overwhelming
majority of Democratic political spending is on English-language (often very dull) television ads. The chart below illustrates the current state of play.

A diverse population, however, receives information in a diversity of forms. Ethnic media, urban radio, and Spanish-language radio and television are just some of the other outlets. Targeted mail and phone programs, cultural events, and other creative forms of outreach (Will.i.am, anybody?) can and should be deployed to reach as many prospective supporters as possible.


There is a growing body of scholarship and proven experience about what works best in elections. Yale Professor Don Green’s book, Get Out the Vote, concludes that personal contact by a trusted messenger is the “gold standard.” Modern consultants, however, rarely devote resources to the gold standard, defaulting to the old stand-by of 30 second TV ads.

Enriching the Wrong People

A big part of the reason that we squander much of the $2+ billion spent each cycle is that there is almost no accountability for results. Donors don’t understand – or don’t care to understand – metrics that will provide clarity, transparency and accountability for how the money is spent.

Incomprehensibly, the incentives in political campaign spending are all out of whack (incomprehensible, that is, unless you’re a consultant). Standard Operating Procedure is for consultants to collect 15% of the amount of money spent on TV ads by a campaign. The more money spent on ads,
the more money the consultants make. Creating an ad, however, is a fixed cost that stays the same whether the ad runs once or a million times. Why, then, do consultants collect money on a percentage basis? Who wouldn’t want to run a gazillion ads then?

This perversely structured system sucks up tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars that could be spent laying the foundation for a new majority electorate in America. If the lion’s share of money is spent on ads (more than $700 million at the federal level alone), and consultants take 15% of the ad buys, then more than $100 million is being given to consultants as income and fees. That’s enough money to hire nearly 2,000 full-time staff people. Imagine a team of 75 full-time staff people in each of the 24 states with 19% People of Color population. That kind of army could transform the composition of the electorate and upend the political status quo in America for decades to come.
CONCLUSION

...hasten the arrival of a new, multi-racial, harmonious, and productive society of which we can all be proud

We are both privileged and challenged to live at a moment of profound societal transformation. The demographic revolution of the past 20 years has created the conditions for a long-term political realignment in America, but it will not just happen naturally. Conservatives and reactionaries are both fomenting fear and division and simultaneously courting key constituencies of the New American Majority. Progressives will not win by downplaying and ignoring the country’s changes. The good news is that a long-term, research-based, culturally competent campaign to build capacity, leadership, and infrastructure in strategic cities, states and regions can hasten the arrival of a new, multi-racial, harmonious, and productive society of which we can all be proud. The time to start is now.