



Willie Horton

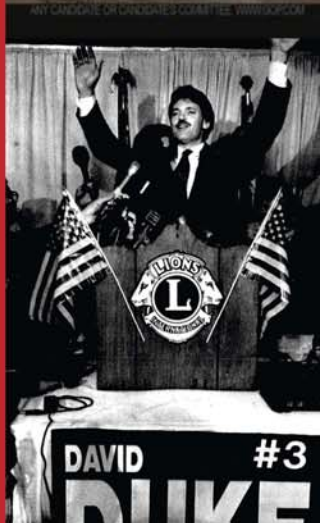


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RACE-BAIT'08:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE POLITICAL DIRTY DOZEN

12 Cases of Playing the Race Card
1983-2007



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**RACE-BAIT '08:
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE
POLITICAL DIRTY DOZEN**

**12 CASES OF PLAYING THE RACE CARD
1983-2007**

A Report by Researchers At
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and

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INTRODUCTION

How will Barack Obama's race play out in the privacy of the voting booth? Much depends on how anti-Obama activists and opposing campaigns play the "race card," pitching appeals to bigotry in the electorate. This report by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley provides a first-of-its-kind analysis of race baiting in American elections and identifies "The Dirty Dozen" – the most disturbing uses of race in elections during the past quarter century. It offers valuable lessons for this election cycle.

The potential for such mischief increases if Obama is nominated, when partisan motives will drive some to use racist tactics, many of them subtle, others not. Consider these straws in the wind:

- Senator John McCain hired as campaign manager (since dismissed) the same man, Terry Nelson, who was creator of the infamous "Ford – He's just not right" TV spot attacking U.S. Senate candidate Harold Ford, Jr., in 2006. Nelson was previously political director in the 2004 Bush-Cheney campaign.
- Just this fall, candidate Mitt Romney speaking before the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, said that "Barack Obama" had called for jihadists to rally in Iraq. He was referring to a videotape from "Osama bin Laden". Later, Romney's campaign said the remark was nothing more than a gaffe.

And it's not only Barack Obama who will have to combat such tactics. Any politician – whether white or nonwhite, whether running for national, state or local office – who backs positions that appeal to minorities, is vulnerable. After all, race baiting has been used in politics for years, often when African-Americans were not candidates. But this time around, the presence of the most viable, African-American presidential candidate in history brings the question of race into high relief.

In coming to grips with this political tactic, it is vital to understand how appeals to racial bigotry, both subtle and unsubtle, have been used in the past. And it's critical to assess how – with new media, new messages and new messengers – the race card may be used in the 2008 campaign.

This report by researchers at UC Berkeley's Department of Political Science, Goldman School of Public Policy and the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity and Diversity at Berkeley Law School offers a first-ever historical review of race-driven campaigning. It dissects "The Dirty Dozen,"

laying bare how race became pivotal, either by becoming a visible issue or by insinuation.

That race-baiting is still regarded as an effective strategy is clear from the 2006 Tennessee Senate race, the first case reviewed in this report. Two weeks before that election, Democrat Harold Ford, an African-American, was in a statistical dead heat with his GOP opponent, Bob Corker. The National Republican Senatorial Committee produced a TV commercial that made hay of the unproven claim that Ford had attended a party at a Playboy mansion. The ad ended with a scantily clad Playboy bunny saying, enticingly: "Call me, Harold." That message played directly on the old taboo of a black man having sex with a white woman. And the ad's punch-line, "He's just not right," might as well have read "just not white." Did the ad turn the tide? Despite howls of protest, it ran for more than a week – until the polls began turning against Ford, who ultimately lost.

Some of the campaigns recounted in "The Dirty Dozen" are familiar – most notoriously the "Willie Horton" attack on Michael Dukakis in the 1988 presidential campaign. Others are less well-known, like the successful 2006 congressional bid of Tom Tancredo, a GOP presidential candidate in the 2008 election cycle, who demonized immigrants with ads that declared, "They're coming to kill you." Whether race is merely insinuated or raised directly, it seems inevitable that some candidates or independent voices will find the basest way to rally their base.

This report on "The Dirty Dozen" moves beyond descriptions to offer a battery of useful lessons. What is the variety of tactics used by those who pander to racial fears? Who has been behind the race-baiting campaigns? Which political operatives have been involved in these battles, playing offense or defense? In combating these radioactive tactics, what works best? Is it wiser to ignore race-baiting or confront it head-on?

In 2008, race-baiting messages, like all attacks, can be broadcast not just via the "old media" – TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and mailings – but also via e-mail, YouTube videos, and cell phone messages. A candidate's campaign staff can pitch the message or other campaigners, at least nominally independent, can do the "Swift Boat-ing" dirty work. The message can be as blatant as the Harold Ford ad or as insidious as repeating Barack Obama's middle name. (Quick: What's John Edwards' middle name? Rudy Guiliani's?)

The first step in stripping the race card out of the campaign playing deck is to understand it in all its guises, and to appreciate the key political moves and counter-moves that might occur. ("By bringing up race, you're the one who's playing the race card.") We hope this report provides a valuable starting point.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Top 20 lessons 2008 politicians should take away from the Race Card Project case summaries:

1. **The freedom to respond to racially sensitive rhetoric is at an all-time high. This is good and bad news for candidates. The good:** We have moved beyond a time when candidates could explicitly use racial epithets and reporters might laugh it off and not report it. **The bad:** Any remark that is even close to being racially insensitive can set off a firestorm and make a campaign more about a candidate's personal views on race than any policy issue.
2. **Be prepared for implicit messages to be used in 2008.** Even as recently as 2006, campaign managers have been willing to use implicit messages and activate deep-rooted stereotypes through ads such as the Corker-Ford campaign's "Call Me" ad. There's no reason to think this year will be different – especially if the Democratic presidential nominee is Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton.
3. **Counter-attack swiftly, and not with the same tactic as your attacker.** Rather than attacking the implicit racial message head-on, Dukakis chose to actually run his own ad using the same tactic. By leaving the counter-attack to others and waiting until the last few weeks of the campaign, Dukakis made a critical error. Those campaigns wondering how to defend against a race-based attack would do well to have a counter-attack ready and reply immediately (see John Kerry and the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth to understand why a non-reply does not work).
4. **In the YouTube era, when video and/or audio of every word a candidate says publicly can be instantly posted on the Internet, racial verbal gaffes are a serious danger.** The George Allen and Joe Biden gaffes (see "Verbal Gaffes" case study) most likely would have never become news stories in another decade, when technology could not have made their remarks available as fuel for public outrage.
5. **The Internet and growth of the blogosphere allows candidates more deniability on the source of racial attacks.** 2008 will be a record year for the mountains of information and opinion published on the Internet. The Internet's "viral" nature ensures that a malicious racial attack can be duplicated thousands of times before it is even noticed by the mainstream press. This means that a campaign can benefit from a racial attack either by encouraging supporters and bloggers to be extra aggressive, then denying any connection with them. In some cases, racial attacks may even be purposely planted but without any traceability to the campaign.

6. **Campaigns are not just a black-and-white equation anymore.** In 2008 Hispanic voters may turn out to be a swing vote in several states where their presence was felt in 2006. Campaigns will have to tailor their messages and counter-messages to racial attacks in a way that makes sense to a Latino constituency. The immigration debate is often cover for those using an implicit race play to activate prejudice against Latinos.
7. **Some issues, especially crime, are race-card “carriers.”** It is difficult to talk about getting “tough on crime” in campaigns without touching on the fact that minorities are disproportionately convicted and incarcerated for violent and drug-related crime. When a candidate decides to use crime as one of the issues in her arsenal, it is very easy to prime racial prejudice in the electorate, as the Willie Horton ad demonstrates.
8. **A late-hit negative ad can have real impacts – especially when it taps into affirmative-action fears.** Polling indicates that the major reason for Harvey Gantt’s failure to unseat Jesse Helms (see case study of 1990 Senate race) was his inability to get more than 40% of the white vote. Most agree that Helms’ racial attacks and the “White Hands” TV ad released in the final weeks of the campaign eroded Gantt’s already weak support among whites.
9. **Democrats need a real counter-attack to accusations of being soft on “reverse discrimination.”** The ultimate outcome of the Gantt-Helms race – one which many believe could have been won by Gantt, had he mounted an effective counter-attack to Helms – was to illustrate that in 1990, the Old South and the New South co-existed. Without addressing the fairness question embedded in the debate on affirmative action (and some might say in the immigration debate, too), Democrats can be vulnerable to this attack again in 2008.
10. **Pandering to known prejudices in a white majority state, especially in the South, still works in some states.** Helms was able to convey a message to white voters that blacks “wanted it all” and that Jim Hunt – in cahoots with Jesse Jackson – would give it to them (see case study on the Helms-Hunt Senate race in 1984). Campaign managers in both parties should keep watch for this tactic and call it out immediately when it happens. Calling attention to it may not help those voters that are automatically swayed by racial appeals, but it may change the vote of those who want to move away from the South’s racist past.
11. **A race play can also be targeted at boosting black turnout.** The use of race in campaigns need not only be an appeal to voters’ prejudice. In the case of Mayor Ray Nagin’s campaign in New Orleans, racializing the campaign brought out a wave of black voters that Nagin rode to reelection. On the other side of that coin are candidates with an explicitly racist past, like David Duke in the Louisiana

governor's race. Gaffes in racial rhetoric or a racist record can motivate voters that might not otherwise vote.

12. **Racial rhetoric can be embedded in standard conservative rhetoric.** Some issues that have racial overtones resonate for moderate whites, such as welfare reform and affirmative action issues. These issues are often presented to voters through the prism of economic, rather than social conservatism. Jesse Helms was a master of translating anti-black rhetoric into the values of opportunity, hard work and fairness. There's no reason to think others will not follow down this well-worn path in 2008.
13. **Dampening the minority vote is a race play in itself.** Candidates (usually Republicans) who do not want to see a large minority population come out on Election Day can stay away from hot-button issues that might activate minority communities (e.g. affirmative action, welfare, poverty). Arguably, in 2008 health care reform is a hot-button issue that could motivate more minority voters to come to the polls.
14. **Beware the safe district incumbent with presidential ambitions.** Race gets you national attention quickly. Tom Tancredo didn't become a national figure because he decided to take leadership on the immigration issue. His extreme rhetoric, and his criticism of Bush's border security (which apparently did not please Karl Rove and company in the White House), were what propelled him into the limelight. A Congressman from an otherwise unnoticed safe Republican district in Colorado figured out he could become noticed by bringing race into the debate and the fear of the influx of "illegals".
15. **"Outing" the race-card strategy of your opponents carries risks.** There are two counter-strategies when a perceived implicit race-play is being made: 1. Call attention to it in the hopes of sparking a backlash against your opponent. This risks having the race-card accusation being turned on you (i.e. "He's just reading too much into this message and trying to play the race card.") 2. Ignoring the implicit race message and steering the debate into terms less relevant for race strategies. Ignoring the message might only exacerbate its impact.
16. **Race in urban elections is still a hot-button issue.** Cities remain racially divided, and this divide can translate into a divided electorate if a campaign becomes racialized as the Washington-Epton race did (see case study on the 1980 Chicago mayoral race).
17. **An African American candidate may be more vulnerable to character attacks than a white candidate.** Epton was quick to go negative, capitalizing on sordid details of Washington's life. While one could say, "That's politics," the "before

it's too late" message of Epton's negative campaign took on a different tone than a normal ad hominem attack because it primed already embedded stereotypes of a threatening black man.

18. **African American candidates may be better positioned to take the lead on being the "racial healer."** David Dinkins played this role in the New York mayoral race, effectively casting himself as the sensible alternative when his opponent was busy making high-profile verbal gaffes. A minority candidate may have more credibility with voters on someone who can bridge the racial divide.
19. **Race-card counter-attack plays are party-blind** – a Republican can effectively cast a Democrat as bigoted by focusing on the rhetoric. See the Congressional race between Gerald Richman and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (see case study for 1989 Congress seat). She labeled the Democrat (Richman) as a "racist" running a "bigoted" campaign when he said the seat was "an American seat" in response to Lee Atwater's statement that it was a "Cuban-American seat." The perception of Ros-Lehtinen's decision was split along ethnic lines; 89% of Cuban Americans thought she was justified, while only five% of Jewish voters agreed.
20. **A race-based message that works in the primary won't necessarily work in the general election.** Gerald Richman's move to call the Congressional seat up for grabs an "American seat" was not supported by the Cuban American population, many of whom (as registered Republicans) did not get to vote in the Democratic primary. When he ran up against a Hispanic candidate in the general election, his words came back to haunt him.

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THE DIRTY DOZEN – CASE ABSTRACTS

1. CORKER vs. FORD 2006, SENATE SEAT, TENNESSEE

Bob Corker (R) defeats Harold Ford

The 2006 Tennessee Senate race was one of the highest-profile Senate seats of the 2006 cycle, pitting former Chattanooga mayor and social conservative Bob Corker against a rising African-American Democratic star, Representative Harold Ford. The candidates remained in a dead heat until the Republican National Committee sponsored a radio advertisement alleging Ford attended a party featuring Playboy playmates. The Corker campaign followed this successful message with an ad entitled, “Call Me,” in which a suggestively-clad Caucasian woman asks Ford to contact her. This implicit message tapped into deep-seated white fears regarding sex between races; despite significant national outcry and a call from Ford to stop the ad, Corker won with a narrow margin.

2. BUSH vs. DUKAKIS 1988, PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

George H.W. Bush (R) defeats Michael Dukakis (D)

The 1988 Presidential general election between sitting Vice President George H. W. Bush and Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis is the setting for arguably the most infamous use of race in modern presidential politics. The Willie Horton ad set a new low for the tactic of using race under the guise of “getting tough on crime,” a rallying cry for both Republicans and Democrats. In a slam against Dukakis’ record as governor, the third-party ad pictured a frightening mug shot of murderer Willie Horton, an African-American, who committed another murder while furloughed by a Massachusetts prison. The program’s purpose was defended as a useful element of corrections policy, providing an incentive for good behavior even for those ineligible for parole. The Bush camp followed with similar yet less offensive ads. Rev. Jesse Jackson decried the attacks as an ugly racial appeal, but his criticism got no traction. The Dukakis campaign failed to recover from the blow, was pulled “off-message” for weeks, and ultimately lost the election.

3. HELMS vs. GANTT 1990, SENATE SEAT, NORTH CAROLINA

Jesse Helms (R) defeats Harvey Gantt (D)

The 1990 North Carolina Senate race against former Charlotte, N.C. mayor Harvey Gantt marked the first time well-established social conservative Senator Jesse Helms used racist tactics directly against an African American. Gantt’s strong biracial support and successful fundraising, most of which came from outside the state, created a formidable “New South” candidate. Trailing significantly in the final weeks because of criticism of his record on education and the environment, Helms shifted the focus of the campaign by releasing the “White Hands” advertisement. The ad derided racial quotas by depicting a pair of white hands crumpling a job rejection letter. Gantt’s campaign went on the defensive against the charges and never regained the ability to

shift the message away from racial issues, ultimately losing to Helms.

4. HELMS vs. HUNT 1984, SENATE SEAT, NORTH CAROLINA

Jesse Helms (R) defeats Jim Hunt (D)

The 1984 North Carolina Senate race between former North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt and Jesse Helms was billed as “the meanest campaign in Senate history.” Hunt’s broad-based popularity as governor positioned him to stave off a strong competitor, but Helms’ recasting of the race in racial terms served him well. Helms frequently called on voters to choose between “the two Jesses” by portraying Jesse Jackson as the opponent in ads and speeches; the campaign distributed buttons with Helms’ image labeled, “Our Jesse.” These inflammatory comparisons, combined with Helms’ fear-based rhetoric that “blacks want it all,” aggressive fundraising, and appeal to moderate voters gave Helms a surprising and close victory.

5. EDWARDS vs. DUKE 1991, GOVERNOR OF LOUISIANA

Edwin Edwards (D) defeats David Duke (R)

Louisiana’s three-term Governor Edwin Edwards faced extensive charges of political and financial wrongdoing and a subsequent collapse of statewide support in a region long tolerant of “colorful” characters. But Edwards emerged as the noblest candidate when running against white supremacist David Duke. A notably diverse coalition formed in opposition to Duke’s candidacy, blanketing the state with third-party advertisements, and emphasizing Edwards’ image as the least offensive candidate.

6. BUCHANAN vs. PRIMARY CANDIDATES 1996

Buchanan (R) wins New Hampshire primary

Former Republican political official and media personality Pat Buchanan’s victory in the 1996 New Hampshire Republican Primary was his political apex — it shows the power of using anti-African American and anti-minority themes in a national race. New Hampshire’s reputation as the predictor for presidential campaigns makes the win a particularly important case. Buchanan’s platform emphasized extreme positions such as “returning to American values,” including condemnation of the inner cities and support of flying the Confederate flag. Republican Presidential candidates had ignored the candidate as a fringe element until this critical win; his success did not carry him to victory in states with larger populations of minority voters.

7. FORDICE vs. MABUS 1991, GOVERNOR OF MISSISSIPPI

Kirk Fordice (R) defeats Ray Mabus (D)

Never previously elected to office, businessman Kirk Fordice beat incumbent Ray Mabus to become Mississippi’s governor during a time of intense political race-baiting across the nation. Fordice focused on Mabus’ failures as governor and “aloof” nature in a state that values folksiness, but he also trumpeted the theme of black versus white,

including calling for prison reform via returning inmates to the “cotton fields ...[to generate] a cash crop that would compensate victims for their crimes.” Fordice’s well-known positions on these race-sensitive issues combined with a light touch allowed him to motivate white voters while not mobilizing African-American voters to oppose him.

**8. TANCREDO vs. WINTER 2006, COLORADO CONGRESSIONAL SEAT
Tom Tancredo (R) defeats Bill Winter (D) for Congress**

Demographic shifts in 21st-century America ensure that race-baiting will be an equal opportunity for a wider range of minorities than simply African Americans. Incumbent and immigrant extremist Tom Tancredo, who is running for the 2008 GOP presidential nomination, capitalized on the fears of threatened whites by using ideology rather than political strategy to shape his platform. Winter’s voice of moderation was drowned out by Tancredo, who captured national attention by calling for the deportation of all illegal immigrants and the end of Miami’s “Third World Nation.”

**9. NAGIN vs. LANDRIEU 2006, MAYOR OF NEW ORLEANS
Ray Nagin (D) defeats Mitch Landrieu (D)**

The 2006 April mayoral election in New Orleans brought 22 candidates to the field plus the beleaguered incumbent Ray Nagin. A few months into the recovery from the Hurricane Katrina disaster, Nagin faced criticism from all sides about how he had managed the city’s evacuation. But after Nagin named New Orleans a “Chocolate City” that would be “chocolate again,” race became an important issue in the campaign. Nagin’s rhetoric throughout the campaign created an “us vs. them” dynamic that, arguably, brought black voters out in droves not through benign solidarity, but through a form of resentment-driven racial competition. He eventually beat the sitting Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu by four points, grabbing 80% of the black vote (he had only mustered 40% of the black vote in 2002).

**10. WASHINGTON vs. EPTON 1983, MAYOR OF CHICAGO
Harold Washington (D) defeats Bernard Epton (R)**

The 1983 Chicago Mayoral race between former House Representative Harold Washington and former House Representative Bernard Epton marked a modern low point in American race relations, and is one of the last blatant examples of race rioting affecting an election. Racist factions in Chicago embraced the fairly moderate Epton as the only choice against African American and rising star Washington; third-party ads entreated voters, “Epton: Before It’s Too Late” and sparked a race riot during a Washington campaign stop in Epton territory. Washington responded with calls for restraint and tried to rise above the fray, ultimately fending off the aggressive attacks.

**11. DINKINS vs. KOCH 1989, MAYOR OF NEW YORK, PRIMARY
David Dinkins (D) defeats incumbent Ed Koch (D)**

In the aftermath of multiple and explosive racial violence incidents — the Bernie Goetz “subway vigilante” shooting, the Central Park jogger “wilding,” the Michael Griffith beating, and the Yuseph Hawkins/Bensonhurst murder — outspoken white Mayor Ed Koch called for the end of black citizen demonstrations and spoke out in support of white citizens’ rights to defend themselves, including making positive comments about Bernie Goetz. Dinkins’ appeal for calm, which positioned him as a racial healer, combined with his tough-on-crime messaging, struck the right balance in a city desperate for a leadership.

12. ROS-LEHTINEN vs. RICHMAN 1989, CONGRESSIONAL SEAT, FLORIDA

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R) defeats Gerald Richman (D) to fill Claude Pepper’s seat

A race riot sparked when a Hispanic police officer shot an unarmed black person, as well as Hispanics’ emergence as a majority of the district’s population, set the stage for a racially-charged political environment. GOP National Committee Chairman Lee Atwater added fuel to the fire by calling the seat a “Cuban-American” seat. Democratic candidate Richman responded by calling the seat an “American seat,” which critics perceived as a slight to Cuban Americans. Democrat Richman went on to garner almost all of the white and African American vote, while State Senator and Cuban-American Ileana Ros-Lehtinen won the seat with the support of almost all Cuban-American voters.

13. A BAKER’S DOZEN — HYMIETOWN, MACACA, AND CLEAN AND NICE-LOOKING AN ASSORTMENT OF VERBAL GAFFES

Verbal gaffes and lapses may not represent full-blown “race play” strategies, but they have had an impact on the dynamic, and maybe the outcome, of major political races. Whether a short-term interruption of the intended messaging or a long-term recasting of the race dynamics and issues, verbal gaffes serve to remind us that race is still the third rail of politics. In the era of ubiquitous media coverage and widespread electronic distribution of slips, the impact of gaffes is far greater than ever before

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THE DIRTY DOZEN – CASE REPORTS

1

CORKER vs. FORD 2006 SENATE SEAT, TENNESSEE Bob Corker (R) defeats Harold Ford

Abstract

The 2006 Tennessee Senate race was one of the highest profile Senate seats of the 2006 cycle, pitting former Chattanooga mayor and social conservative Bob Corker against a rising African-American Democratic star, Representative Harold Ford. The candidates remained in a dead heat until the Republican National Committee sponsored a radio advertisement alleging Ford attended a party featuring Playboy playmates. The Corker campaign followed this successful message with an ad entitled, "Call Me," in which a suggestively-clad Caucasian woman asks Ford to contact her. This implicit message tapped into deep-seated white fears regarding sex between races; despite significant national outcry and a call from Ford to stop the ad, Corker won with a narrow margin.

Who:

Republican **Bob Corker** is the former mayor of Chattanooga, Tenn., the state finance commissioner and a successful businessman in the construction industry. A social and economic conservative, Corker has a reputation as a dirty campaigner, previously running ads claiming former opponent Bill Frist was a draft dodger.

Democrat **Harold Ford** is a young, charismatic former Congressman who positioned himself as a moderate African American candidate who could still be an agent of change. Ford caught the attention of the Democratic Party when he easily won a House seat in the heavily Democratic and black district. Ford was vying to be the first black Senator from the South since Reconstruction. His father, a state senator, was indicted on corruption charges.

Campaign Consultants:

– for Ford

Campaign Managers: Jim Hester, Beecher Frazier replaced Hester in August 2006

Media Consultants: Pollster Harrison Hickman, Global Strategy Group; Marius Penczner, Penn Schoen Berland and Associates

First team was later replaced by:

Pete Brodniz, Benenson Strategy Group to do survey research work/polling
Jim Margolis of GMMB, as his lead media consultant

Brodniz worked for Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine's campaign prior to this campaign. Margolis was an adviser to John Kerry, later briefly advised former Virginia Gov. Mark Warner on his 2008 presidential prospects.

– for **Corker**

Campaign Mangers: Ben Mitchell, Tom Ingram

Media Consultants: Fred Davis, Strategic Perception Inc., also did work for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and President Bush

RNC media consultant responsible for "Call Me" ad: Scott Howell (formerly of Karl Rove's Texas outfit, and a protégé of Lee Atwater), Scott Howell & Company, and Terry Nelson.

Howell's other employers: South Dakota Senator John Thune, who defeated Tom Daschle in 2006. Georgia Senator Saxby Chambliss, who defeated Max Cleland using an ad linking Cleland to Osama Bin Laden.

Where are they now: Terry Nelson, who helped produce the "Call Me" ad, now worked for John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign. Scott Howell is employed by Rudy Giuliani's 2008 presidential campaign.

Campaign:

Corker won the Republican primary with 48% with some stiff competition, while Ford breezed through his primary with no real opposition and 80% of the vote. But the final election outcome was a squeaker. Corker took 50.7%, compared to Ford's 48%.

This was a hotly contested and high-profile seat for the Republicans, which previously belonged to Senate Majority leader Bill Frist. The Republicans faced a serious challenge from Democrats across the country in light of backlash against the Iraq War, and seats previously considered Republican strongholds were in real play for the first time in many years. The Republicans considered this a bellwether seat and tried to create a "firewall" around it to protect their national profile and control of the Senate. The race turned negative early, after Corker refused to debate Ford responds by calling Corker "a wimp;" Corker responds by focusing on Ford's emotional stability.

When race came in:

A month before the election, the Republican Senatorial Committee produced an ad "What Kind of Man is Harold Ford?" featuring the statement, "What kind of man parties with Playboy Playmates in lingerie, then films a commercial from a

church pew?" The ad was made even though Ford's attendance at a Playboy mansion party was never confirmed. Less than two weeks before the election, the race was a statistical dead heat. The Corker campaign then produces an ad which portrays a white hunter saying that Ford "wants to take our guns away," then cuts to a scantily-clad white woman stating that Ford attended a party sponsored Playboy. The woman, an attractive blond with a suggestive voice, asks Ford to "call me" as the tag line, "Harold Ford: He's just not right" flashes on the screen. For many, this last image is full of symbolism – the taboo of a black man having a sexual relationship with a woman in the South is a trigger that can be tripped with an implicit message. Whether or not the campaign intended this effect, and the outrage that followed the ad, is unclear. But it is clear from the national attention it received that many people got the message. The publicity does not appear to change polling numbers over the next week by either benefiting or harming Ford or Corker, but more than a week before the election the polls finally drift by 1 or 2 points in Corker's favor, with the greatest shift toward Corker coming from white females.

There is little evidence, however, for the so-called "Bradley effect," a trend observed by some pollsters and academics that show large discrepancies between polling and actual voting of white voters for non-white candidates. In these races, candidates such as Tom Bradley running for California governor in 1982 ultimately lose the race despite polling well. White voters seem to display support for a non-white candidate to avoid appearing racist to pollsters, but then change their minds at the ballot box. In the Ford race, there was only a 1% drop-off between the white votes for Ford (40% of white voters voted for Ford) and polling for white support for Ford pre-election (41% of the white voters stated they would vote for Ford 4 weeks before the election).

Corker's counter-strategy:

Corker called for the ad to be pulled, but it runs for over a week. After the ad aired, Ford crashed a Corker press conference with less than two weeks left in the campaign to call for Corker to stop attacking his family. This event occurred only a few days after Corker begins to take a lead from a statistical dead heat. The event allows Corker to move ahead slightly, as Ford is criticized for the move and Corker handles the situation well.

Lessons learned:

- The fact pattern shows that the party tested a more tentative ad run by the national Republican leadership several weeks earlier. The national Republican leadership has demonstrated a strong stomach to use race in modern-day races, and in light of tepid public outcry, became bolder in the portrayal of implicit yet highly-charged race-based themes. It remains to be seen whether or not the reaction to the "Call Me" will embolden the

party to pursue this tactic in the 2008 presidential race.

2

BUSH vs. DUKAKIS 1988 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN George H.W. Bush (R) defeats Michael Dukakis (D)

Abstract

The 1988 Presidential general election between sitting Vice President George H. W. Bush and Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis is the setting for arguably the most infamous use of race in modern presidential politics. The Willie Horton ad set a new low for racialized campaign tactics under the guise of “getting tough on crime,” a common theme between Republicans and Democrats. In a shot at Dukakis’ record as governor, the third-party ad pictured a frightening mug shot of murderer Willie Horton, who committed another murder while furloughed by a Massachusetts prison. The program’s purpose was defended as a useful element of corrections policy, providing an incentive for good behavior even for those ineligible for parole. The Bush camp followed with similar yet less offensive ads. Rev. Jesse Jackson decried the attacks as an ugly racial appeal, but his criticism got no traction. The Dukakis campaign failed to recover from the blow, was pulled “off-message” for weeks, and ultimately lost the election.

As Tali Mendelberg points out in her book, *The Race Card*, “It was not until Bush’s veto of the 1990 civil rights bill that [Jesse] Jackson’s charge was adopted by journalists as the conventional interpretation of the Horton appeal. That the Willie Horton campaign was about race was obvious only three years after it transpired.” (p. 4)

The Willie Horton ad against Michael Dukakis has become the gold standard of implicit racial appeals. Mendelberg assembles ample evidence that the implicit racial message in the Willie Horton ad did affect public opinion, perhaps in a decisive way.

Who:

George H.W. Bush, former CIA director and vice president at the time of the campaign, actually did not have a connection to the original Willie Horton ads that began running Sept. 21, 1988.

Michael Dukakis, governor of Massachusetts in 1988, had several public relations debacles during his losing campaign, including his “tank moment,” when his campaign arranged a photo op of him on an M1 Abrams tank in Michigan. The Bush campaign ended up using this footage, which did not put him in the best “tough guy” light, to demonstrate his weakness as a commander in chief.

Campaign Consultants:

– Bush

Campaign manager: Lee Atwater (Camp. Mgr)

Media consultant for Willie Horton ad: Roger Ailes, who moved on to become George W. Bush's media consultant in 2000.

– for Dukakis

Campaign chair: Paul Broutas

Campaign managers: Susan Estrich, John Sasso

Media consultants: Gary M. Susnjara took a leave of absence as president of Saatchi & Saatchi DFS Inc. to head the group. Scott Miller is a Democratic political consultant and former creative director at McCann-Erickson.

Campaign:

The 1988 campaign will always be remembered as one of the most negative campaigns, perhaps unfairly. But the high-profile Willie Horton ad, followed by the Bush campaign's "Revolving Door" ad which showed inmates walking in and out of a prison through a revolving door, is credited with crippling Dukakis and putting him on the defensive. Bush also successfully cast him as weak on defense (Dukakis said he would reduce "Star Wars" spending) as well as crime (the furlough program was only one vulnerable point – he also opposed the death penalty, unlike a majority of Americans).

When race came in:

The surprising thing about the 1988 campaign is that race did *not* come into play during the campaign itself ... yet it is known as a classic implicit race card play. There can be no doubt that showing Willie Horton's mug shot – what media consultant Larry McCarthy called "every suburban mother's worst fear" – was meant as a scare tactic, even though the media didn't pick up on the racial message.

Dukakis' counter-strategy:

While Dukakis staff strongly agreed with Jesse Jackson that much of the attack's power came from its racial element, they were unable to devise an effective response. Dukakis released his own ad about an escaped murderer from a federal correctional facility, Angel Medrano. However, Medrano was not serving a life sentence without parole, as Horton was, so the comparison fell flat. The lack of an effective counter-attack only increased the impact of the Horton ads – by leaving it to Jesse Jackson and vice presidential candidate Lloyd Bentsen, briefly, to bring up the implicit race message in the ads, Dukakis only looked weaker. His choosing to ignore the attack actually magnified its importance.

Lessons learned:

- **Counter-attack swiftly, and not with the same tactic as your attacker.**

Rather than attacking the implicit racial message head-on, Dukakis chose to actually run his own ad using the same tactic. By leaving the counter-attack to others and waiting until the last few weeks of the campaign, Dukakis made a critical error.

- **Beware of the implicit message.** Issue ads sometimes carry implicit messages — intentional or unintentional — that stir up pre-existing prejudice or fears in the electorate. This is the stuff that moves opinion polls, and changes elections.
- **Some issues, especially crime, are race-card “carriers.”** It is difficult to talk about getting “tough on crime” in campaigns without touching on the fact that minorities are disproportionately convicted and incarcerated for violent and drug-related crime. When a candidate decides to use crime as one of the issues in her arsenal, it is very easy to prime racial prejudice in the electorate, as Horton demonstrates.

3

HELMS vs. GANTT 1990 SENATE SEAT, NORTH CAROLINA Jesse Helms (R) defeats Harvey Gantt (D)

Abstract

The 1990 North Carolina Senate race against former Charlotte, N.C. mayor Harvey Gantt marked the first time well-established social conservative Senator Jesse Helms used racist tactics directly against an African American. Gantt’s strong biracial support and successful fundraising, most of which came from outside the state, created a formidable “New South” candidate. Trailing significantly in the final weeks due to criticism of his record on education and the environment, Helms shifted the focus of the campaign by releasing the “White Hands” advertisement. The ad derided racial quotas by depicting a pair of white hands crumpling a job rejection letter. Gantt’s campaign went on the defensive against the charges and never regained the ability to shift the message away from racial issues, ultimately losing to Helms.

If Helms’ victories over Congressman Nick Galifianakis (1978) and Governor Jim Hunt (1984) highlighted the racial divisions still lingering in North Carolina, his race against Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt would place these divisions into starker and irrefutable contrast. Helms had battled Hunt by labeling him a flip flopper — a claim made possible by Helms’ willingness to tell half truths, and at times, total untruths — and relaying a simple message: Jim Hunt and Jesse Jackson are in cahoots, and they are going to give to black

North Carolinians at the expense of white North Carolinians and American values.

What would change in 1990 was neither Helms' ultra conservative values nor his appeal to racial prejudice, but rather that for the first time he unleashed them upon an African American challenger.

Who:

Harvey Gantt was the first African American admitted to Clemson University and received his graduate degree in architecture from MIT; prior to challenging Helms, he served as Mayor of Charlotte. Gantt's campaign emerged from the Democratic primary with a strong biracial coalition, and hoped to capitalize on a non-favorable presidential environment for Helms (in 1978, Helms benefited from Carter's unpopularity, and in 1984, from Reagan's popularity) – something both Galifianakis and Hunt lacked. Gantt's fundraising efforts were extremely successful, though notably 60% of funds were from outside the state, signifying that as a credible challenger to Helms, the race had become paradigmatic for many of the struggle between good and bad, intransigence and progress, the Old South and the New South.

Jesse Helms will likely be remembered as both the most well known and most divisive figure of twentieth century North Carolina politics. David Broder, eschewing the glossed-over quality of reporting in the wake of Helms' death, noted: "What really sets Jesse Helms apart is that he is the last prominent unabashed white racist politician in this country – a title that one hopes will now be permanently retired." Indeed, Helms' rise to power seemed focused around two factors: his bedrock conservative – and frequently racist – social commentary (Helms got his start as a journalist and radio commentator) and the financial backing of the National Congressional Club. The Congressional Club, originally created to help Helms pay off his 1972 campaign debt, was by 1978 the largest national PAC; it granted Helms an immense financial advantage and allowed him to nearly monopolize the North Carolina airwaves.

Campaign Consultants:

– Helms

Campaign manager: Alex Castellanos, National Media, Inc.

– for Gantt

Campaign managers: Mel Watt, Mandy Grunwald

Where are they now: Alex Castellanos now works on Mitt Romney's presidential campaign. Mandy Grunwald works on the Hillary Clinton campaign.

Campaign:

Polling showed that Gantt had a strong margin over Helms, of 5% to 10% through the final weeks of the campaign. Helms eventually prevailed 52% to Gantt's 47% of the vote. The strategy of the Gantt campaign was focused, much like that of other African American candidates like Douglas Wilder (Virginia governor's race) and David Dinkins (mayor of New York), on deracialization. Much like Jim Hunt did in 1984, Gantt heaped blame on Helms' policy record, notably weak on both education and environmental safety. Further explanations for Helms' late surge was the "Bradley Effect" (see *Corker vs. Ford* case), a trend observed by pollsters and academics in which white voters poll as likely to vote for a nonwhite candidate to avoid appearing racist to the pollster, but then change their minds at the ballot box.

When race came in:

Desperate to close the polling gap, the Helms campaign increased their focus on race-based issues like racial quotas in hiring and school admissions practices. Perhaps the most infamous racial ad of the last thirty years was Helms' "White Hands" ad, which featured a pair of white hands crumpling up a job rejection letter. A background voice states: "You needed that job. And you were the best qualified. But they gave it to a minority because of a racial quota." In the wake of this late-running ad, Helms continued to label Gantt an ultra-liberal and as out of sync with North Carolina values.

Gantt's counter-strategy:

Reporters covering the race noted that the Gantt campaign seemed thoroughly on the defensive late in the campaign. They were so busy rebutting accusations of ultra-liberalism that a comprehensive counter-attack to Helms' use of race seemed out of reach. This failure to counter was ultimately a costly mistake.

Lessons learned:

- **A late-hit negative ad can have real impact – especially when it taps into affirmative-action fears.** Polling indicates that the major reason for Gantt's failure to unseat Helms was his inability to get more than 40% of the white vote. The key to this seems to have come in the final weeks of the campaign, and is largely correlated with Helms' racial attacks and "White Hands" commercial. The lack of any other convincing explanatory factors for a late-race shift give this further credence.
- **Race of the candidate may matter less than how he/she stands on racial issues.** The proximate question is whether this inability was because of his race, personally speaking, or his stance on race-centric issues. To the degree that election results nearly perfectly mirrored Hunt's outcomes six years earlier, it would seem that his stance on racial issues was far more important than his race, personally speaking. It would seem that roughly ten% of those who polled as for Gantt ultimately voted for Helms.

- **An effective counter-attack is needed to fight accusations of being soft on “reverse discrimination.”** The ultimate outcome of this race — one which many believe could have been won by Gantt, had he mounted an effective counter-attack to Helms — was to illustrate that in 1990, the Old South and the New South co-existed. The Democratic Party could field an accomplished and charismatic African American for statewide office with a strong biracial coalition; the Republican Party, however, could still field a staunch conservative and icon of prejudice with homogenous white backing — and win.

4

HELMS vs. HUNT 1984 SENATE SEAT, NORTH CAROLINA Jesse Helms (R) defeats Jim Hunt (D)

Abstract

The 1984 North Carolina Senate race between former North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt and Jesse Helms is billed as “the meanest campaign in Senate history.” Hunt’s broad-based popularity as governor positioned him to stave off a strong competitor, but Helms’ recasting of the race in racial terms served him well. Helms frequently called on voters to choose between “the two Jesses” by portraying Jesse Jackson as the opponent in ads and speeches; the campaign distributed buttons with Helms’ image labeled, “Our Jesse.” These inflammatory comparisons, combined with Helms’ fear-based rhetoric that “blacks want it all,” aggressive fundraising, and appeal to moderate voters gave Helms a surprising and close victory.

Jim Hunt’s unsuccessful attempt to unseat the late Jesse Helms highlighted North Carolina’s racial fissures and forecast the dynamics that would plague Harvey Gantt’s subsequent bids. Bill Peterson referred to the race as “the meanest campaign in Senate history.” At \$22 million — the majority of it raised by Helms — it was also the most expensive.

Who:

Jim Hunt, the son of a rural farmer and school teacher, remains the epitome of Baptist morality, plain sensibility and bootstraps determination. His meteoric rise from leader of the Young Democrats to Governor was forecast by all who knew him, and his policies — pro-tobacco, strong on public education and business recruitment — brought him the distinction of being North Carolina’s first two-term governor of the twentieth century (he served four terms in all, again from 1993-2001). Hunt was so popular that in October of 1983, Richard Whittle, a Washington Post reporter and North Carolina native, declared

“Barring an act of God, Helms can’t win ... the roar of the battle indeed promises to be titanic. But if the volume implies doubt about the outcome, it shouldn’t. It’s all over but the shouting.”

Jesse Helms will likely be remembered as both the most well known and most divisive figure of twentieth century North Carolina politics. David Broder, eschewing the glossed-over quality of reporting in the wake of Helms’ death, noted: “What really sets Jesse Helms apart is that he is the last prominent unabashed white racist politician in this country – a title that one hopes will now be permanently retired.” Indeed, Helms’ rise to power seemed focused around two factors: his bedrock conservative – and frequently racist – social commentary (Helms got his start as a journalist and radio commentator) and the financial backing of the National Congressional Club. The Congressional Club, originally created to help Helms pay off his 1972 campaign debt, was by 1978 the largest national PAC; it granted Helms an immense financial advantage and allowed him to nearly monopolize the North Carolina airwaves.

Campaign Consultants:

– **Helms**

Campaign strategist: Carter Wrenn, Tom Ellis (adviser)

Media consultants: Alex Castellanos, National Media Inc.; Mike Murphy, Charles Black, Earl Ashe of Jefferson Marketing

– for **Hunt**

Campaign manager: Betty McCain

Media consultants: David Sawyer, Sawyer/Miller Group

Where are they now: Charles Black works on John McCain’s presidential campaign.

Campaign:

Helms was a polarizing figure who never won more than 55% of votes; he ultimately beat Hunt 52% to 48%. In a state that long-considered itself the progressive star of the South, he willingly sacrificed the black vote and based his victories on engendering a fear of black militancy and liberal over-reach in white North Carolinians. In the context of the 1984 race, a number of issues present themselves along with Helms’ use of race. Reagan’s national appeal and Mondale’s floundering campaign were to his distinct advantage. Helms disproportionate fundraising and willingness to flatly lie about Hunt’s record allowed him to indelibly label Hunt – an avowed and proven moderate – as an ultra-liberal and flip-flopper. Importantly, though Helms never lacked for a racist comment of his own, he had third parties do much of his dirtiest work for him, including a famous accusation that Hunt was “supported largely by

homosexuals, a claim made by the Helms-friendly Landmark Newspaper.

Where race came in:

Helms utilized the race card in a primarily explicit manner. In terms of explicit attacks, Helms frequently noted that North Carolina voters had to choose between “two Jesses.” The “other Jesse” was commonly known to be the Reverend Jesse Jackson and was frequently shown side by side with Hunt in Helms’ ads. Helms frequently claimed that the Reverend Jesse Jackson was “Jim Hunt’s good friend” and that “blacks want it all.” “Our Jesse” buttons were commonly worn by Helms supporters. While this is certainly an explicit use of race, Helms left some of the most egregious uses of race to third parties handling direct mailing, which called for white get-out-the-vote efforts explicitly to counteract Jim Hunt’s registration efforts in poor and predominantly black rural areas. The “bloc vote” was a common term used by Helms to characterize Hunt’s support. The obvious phonetic similarity of bloc to black, and its pairing with the phrase “least educated,” left no doubt to Helms’ intent. Importantly, such third party efforts were continually buttressed and reinforced by Helms’ own comments, including his consistent rallying against the establishment of Martin Luther King Day, which he eschewed for both on substantive and economic-cost grounds. While Hunt's and others' responses noted the hyper-conservatism of Helms with the common refrain of “How far exactly do you want to take us back, Jesse?”, Hunt's campaign continued to focus on policy and his past governance record.

Lessons learned:

- **Pandering to known prejudices in a white majority state still works in some states.** Helms was able to convey a message to white voters that blacks “wanted it all” and that Jim Hunt – in cahoots with Jesse Jackson – would give it to them. Given to what degree Hunt’s populist policies and record favored the broad swath of North Carolina voters – particularly over Helms’ corporate-friendly record – voter ignorance aside, it is difficult to dispute this.
- **Focusing on black turnout can backfire.** The efforts of the Hunt campaign to turn out the rural black vote made Helms’ strategy possible – and the failure of this effort on election day ensured Hunt’s failure. It is possible that many whites who reported themselves as for Hunt in polling were in actuality planning on voting for Helms, but did not want to voice what might seem to be a socially unacceptable, race-intolerant vote. This proved crucial, as the 10% of undecided voters nearing Election Day were almost all white.
- **Racial rhetoric can be embedded in standard conservative rhetoric.**

While Helms' efforts in this regard might have elsewhere lost moderate white votes, his ability to portray himself as a Reagan Republican — as well as his occasional appearance with black conservatives such as Roosevelt Grier and Alan Keyes — managed to quell the concerns of moderate whites. He presented himself to moderates as an economic rather than social conservative, and translated his anti-black rhetoric to the values of opportunity and hard work rather than that of handouts and welfare.

5

EDWARDS vs. DUKE 1991 GOVERNOR OF LOUISIANA Edwin Edwards (D) defeats David Duke (R)

Abstract

Louisiana's three-term Governor Edwin Edwards faced extensive charges of political and financial wrongdoing and a subsequent collapse of state-wide support in a region long tolerant of "colorful" characters, but emerged as the noblest candidate when pitted against white supremacist David Duke. A notably diverse coalition formed in opposition to Duke's candidacy, blanketing the state with third-party advertisements, and emphasizing Edwards' image as the least offensive candidate.

Who:

Edwin Edwards was a 3-term Democratic governor of Louisiana who served twice as many terms as any other Louisiana governor. Edwards was also Louisiana's first Catholic governor in the twentieth century and perhaps with the exception of Huey P. Long, was Louisiana's most popular governor. A colorful, powerful and legendary figure in Louisiana politics, Edwards was long dogged by charges of corruption. In [2001](#) he was sentenced to 10 years in prison on racketeering charges.

David Duke is a former Republican member of the Louisiana House of Representatives, a candidate in presidential primaries for both the Democratic and Republican parties, and former Grand Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Duke is a self-styled "white nationalist"; he states he's a "racial realist" and that "all people have a basic human right to preserve their own heritage."

Charles E. "Buddy" Roemer, III, was the sitting Democratic governor but switched parties for the 1991 campaign. This was helpful to Edwards because Roemer peeled away many Republicans that might have wanted to stay with

the party but could not tolerate Duke's racist appeals. He came in third, leaving Edwards and Duke in the general election.

Campaign:

Louisiana has a so-called "jungle primary" in which multiple candidates from both parties are on the ballot in a first-round. In the first round of voting in October, Edwards edged Duke 34% to 32%, while Roemer running as a second Republican came in third at 27%. In the runoff vote, Edwards easily prevailed with 61%, getting nearly all of the black vote statewide. Duke got only 39%, but notably won 55% of the white vote with his welfare reform message.

Edwards was beaten by sitting Governor Charles E. "Buddy" Roemer in the previous election in an ugly battle over Edwards' corrupt practices. Edwards was thought by many to be corrupt, but he was also seen as minority-friendly. Support for Edwards grew between the primary and the runoff. Faced with the alternative of Duke, who ran on "equal rights for all" that many suspected was a proxy for "equal rights for whites," many voters who were frustrated with Edwards' corrupt found he was the lesser of two evils. Edwards scored an endorsement from Roemer; and even President Bush admitted that Edwards, the Democrat, was a better choice than Duke, a putative Republican.

When race came in:

Race was immediately a factor because of Duke's notoriety and white supremacist past. Edwards capitalized on this inescapable history of Duke's and sealed the victory.

Edwards' counter-strategy:

There was an extensive advertising campaign that slammed Duke, much of it from a range of third parties like the state party and independent groups. Third-party LCARN (Louisiana Coalition against Racism and Nazism) ran ads, including "Nazi," which was a collection of images of Duke in Nazi regalia with a voiceover of various racist statements, including, "You can call me a Nazi if you wish," and fading to an image of Hitler.

Lessons learned:

- **Candidates with a history of explicit racism can make life hard for their party.** Even in Louisiana, a state with a history of racism – or maybe for that very reason – the Republican party scrambled to distance itself from Duke.
- **Candidates with a racist past can mobilize motivated voting blocs – especially African Americans and other minorities – and hand them to their opponents.** Duke received essentially none of the African American vote and brought out new Edwards supporters.

6

BUCHANAN vs. PRIMARY CANDIDATES 1996 Buchanan (R) wins New Hampshire primary

Abstract

Former Republican political official and media personality Pat Buchanan's victory in the 1996 New Hampshire Republican Primary marks his political apex, serving as a shocking example of anti-African American and anti-minority themes in a national race. New Hampshire's reputation as the predictor for presidential campaigns makes the win a particularly important case. Buchanan's platform emphasized extreme positions as "returning to American values," including condemnation of the inner cities and support of flying the Confederate flag. Republican Presidential candidates had ignored the candidate as a fringe element until this critical win; his success did not translate in states with larger populations of minority voters.

In 1992, the Anti-Defamation League charged that Buchanan had "a 30-year record of intolerance unmatched by any other mainstream political figure." While some may note that Buchanan is given a "free pass" either by media, because he is "one of them," or by the public, because he is "marginal," his 1996 victory in the New Hampshire Primary merits particular scrutiny. Nixon, Reagan and Bush — the previous three Republican Presidents — each won the state, as did Clinton in 1992. New Hampshire's magnified importance — alone between Iowa and Super-Tuesday — have made it a launching pad for nearly every nominee of the last quarter century and prompted former Governor John Sununu's remark that "The people of Iowa pick corn, the people of New Hampshire pick presidents." Beyond this, New Hampshire is 96% white — a unique environment for race baiting, effective or not.

Who:

Patrick Buchanan earned the name "Mr. Inside" after working for Nixon, and then served as White House Director of Communications for Reagan. He is known for his economic populism — he advocated rejecting NAFTA and declared "The peasants are coming with pitchforks," and occasionally appeared with a pitchfork, thus earning him the nickname "Pitchfork Pat."

Importantly, Buchanan's present eight year retreat from public office — or the race for it — should not incorrectly shade the manner in which we look back on his 1996 bid for the Republican nomination — and the race baiting which took place. Buchanan finished second in Iowa, and his populist economic rhetoric both stole a great deal of media attention and significantly shifted the frame of the Republican debate. Later that year, his threat to run on an independent

ticket, should Dole select a pro-choice Vice-Presidential nominee, may have been the single largest contributing factor to Dole's selection of Jack Kemp.

Campaign Consultants:

Campaign manager: Bay Buchanan
Media consultant firm: Carolyn Melby

Campaign:

Buchanan's 1996 bid was largely focused on "outsider" rhetoric, which successfully ignored his past political experience with Nixon and Reagan. He out-campaigned Bob Dole and won with 27% of the vote.

When race came in:

Buchanan used race in both implicit and explicit rhetoric. Importantly, while his explicit comments may overshadow implicit messaging in the context of earned media coverage, implicit messaging may resonate even more deeply with segments of the electorate. Such implicit messaging is seen in Buchanan's issue base: his rejection of NAFTA, which he frequently framed as good for Mexico and bad for America and the need to "take back America" and "return to American values." In 1996, as in 1992, such rhetoric was coupled with condemnations of the "inner city." Buchanan as well publicly supported the right to fly the Confederate Flag as representative of Southern heritage and the building of a wall on the Mexican border (a much more contentious proposal then) which he linked in his speeches to crime and welfare. Importantly, Buchanan's implicit use of race comprises the vast majority of his paid media, rather than earned media or public comments.

Buchanan's explicit messaging has to be placed in a specific context. He is a controversial figure who both as a Washington insider and media personality is known as an arch conservative. His messaging was not the strategic attempt to garner points at any stage in the race, but he aimed for a consistent tone. He routinely defended Hitler, termed women as not having the equal endowments of men necessary to excel in a capitalist society, called AIDS nature's revenge on homosexuals for their attack on nature, and referred to the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko as "the porch-n—r of the Politburo." He labeled the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa, in which 67 blacks were killed, as "whites mistreating a couple of blacks."

Candidates' counter-strategies:

Dole and other candidates mostly ignored Buchanan as a fringe candidate until it was too late. There was no effective counter-message or reclaiming of Buchanan's hold on "American values" and protectionist rhetoric.

Lessons learned:

- **Do not discount the power of the right rhetoric in the right state.**

Buchanan's economic message and hidden racial undertones resonated in a state that was nearly all white.

- **Economic populism and nationalistic rhetoric is often a cover for racial rhetoric.** Buchanan had an uncanny ability to get voters to ignore his past explicitly racist statements in favor of the milder messages of economic protectionism.
- **One win does not a viable candidate make.** Buchanan's upset victory, though historic, did not help him in the rest of the primaries. His momentum quickly dissipated in the comparatively minority-heavy states of Super Tuesday.

7

FORDICE vs. MABUS 1991 GOVERNOR OF MISSISSIPPI Kirk Fordice (R) defeats Ray Mabus (D)

Abstract

Never previously elected to office, businessman Kirk Fordice beat the incumbent Ray Mabus to become Mississippi's Governor during a time of intense political race baiting across the nation. Fordice focused on Mabus' failures as Governor and "aloof" nature in a state that values folksiness, but also trumpeted general themes of black against white, including calling for prison reform via returning inmates to the "cotton fields...[to generate] a cash crop that would compensate victims for their crimes." Fordice's well-known positions on these race-sensitive issues allowed him to successfully motivate white voters while avoiding mobilizing African-American voters.

If future candidates wanted to take a lesson from the stunning victory by conservative Republican Kirk Fordice over incumbent "New South Democrat" Ray Mabus, it could be summed up with this bit of advice: "Make sure you cover yourself with a non-race story before you walk into race-issue politics."

Who:

Kirk Fordice (who died in 2004) was a construction contractor from Vicksburg, Miss., who had never held elective office before taking on incumbent Democrat Ray Mabus. In winning the gubernatorial race, he became the first Republican to hold the office in 116 years.

Ray Mabus was a 39-year-old Harvard-educated candidate when he won the governor's seat in 1987. He ran on the promise of reforming education and beginning a state lottery to support education, both of which failed to materialize in the following four years. Many thought his Ivy-league speech

patterns and “non-folksiness” hurt him during the campaign. He had been trying to be the first Mississippi governor to win back-to-back terms, since a prohibition against re-election had just been lifted in 1987.

Campaign:

Fordice won 51% to 47%, with independent Shawn O’Hara picking up the remaining two percentage points. Fordice campaigned as a plain-talking political outsider who wanted to bring his business sense and aggressiveness to running the state.

Where race came in:

Fordice was firmly against minority set-asides in contracting and affirmative action in general, as well as reforming welfare programs. All of these issues opened him up to charges from the Mabus camp that he was trying to leverage racial resentment in Mississippi, which has a long history. He did not help his own cause by often letting loose with controversial comments that many interpreted as racist. In one exchange over prison conditions, Fordice said that inmates should be “back in the cotton fields ... [generating] a cash crop that would compensate victims for their crimes.” As governor, other verbal gaffes got him into trouble, including referring to the country as a “Christian nation” during a Republican governor’s conference, then refusing to accept another governor’s correction of “Judeo-Christian.”

Mabus sought to cast Fordice as playing the race card by focusing on issues that Mississippi whites would seize on as examples of “reverse discrimination” against whites. But Fordice successfully kept his opponents’ accusations from becoming a big story in the media.

Fordice’s counter-strategy: How did Fordice manage to continue to stir racial resentment with attacks on racial quotas without taking the blame of being the one to “play the race card?” First, he came into the race already having declared his opposition to set-aside programs. Before entering politics, Fordice was a top official for the industry trade group, Associated General Contractors, which successfully brought a case against minority set-aside contracting programs, which the Supreme Court agreed in 1989 was unconstitutional. His credibility as someone who had long held the position, rather than bringing it up for political expediency, was already in place. He did not make these efforts against affirmative action programs a centerpiece of his campaign.

Fordice was careful not to inflame public sentiment, even in television ads that had the potential to do so. In one ad in which he called for “workfare not welfare,” a photo of a black woman with a baby in her arms was complemented by another photo of a middle-class black woman pushing a child in a shopping cart. By insulating himself against attacks, Fordice managed to keep black anger at some of his more inflammatory statements at a lower level than in the neighboring state of Louisiana, where former Ku Klux Klansman David Duke

was running for governor. Though opponents tried to compare him to Duke, who was running on many of the same issues, there were far fewer past racist statements to cast him as Duke-like.

The black vote was a deciding factor – while Fordice only garnered 5% of the black vote, turnout was only 40% for blacks. Duke, by contrast, inspired black voters to come out in legions (an 80% turnout) which resulted in his landslide defeat by 12%age points. Fordice played on racial resentment – he won a strong majority of the white vote – without appearing to be a racist himself (at least to most voters).

Lessons learned:

- **Stick to issues for which you already have credibility.** Fordice brought up race-sensitive issues that he had already worked on in the past, nullifying charges that he was using them as a cynical ploy for more votes.
- **A successful “race card” strategy requires keeping minority voters apathetic.** Fordice certainly had some questionable quotes, but nothing like gubernatorial candidate David Duke. Even minority leaders had a grudging respect for him: “A lot of us were impressed with his willingness to mix it up,” said Ralph Thomas, executive director of the National Association of Minority Contractors. “At least we know a governor with whom we can talk cordially and with whom we can agree on some things.”
- **Focus on non-racial issues to deflect criticism of playing the race card.** Fordice focused on his opponent’s economic failures during a recession and his distant, somewhat arrogant demeanor. Fordice seized on Mabus’ vice-presidential ambitions as evidence that he wasn’t focused on the state’s most important issues.

8

TANCREDO vs. WINTER 2006
COLORADO CONGRESSIONAL SEAT
Tom Tancredo (R) defeats Bill Winter (D) for Congress

Abstract

Demographic shifts in 21st-century America ensure that race baiting will be an equal opportunity for a wider range of minorities than simply African Americans. Incumbent and immigrant extremist Tom Tancredo capitalized on the fears of threatened whites by using ideology rather than political strategy to shape his platform. Capturing national attention far beyond the stature of the Colorado Congressional seat by calling for the deportation of all illegal immigrants and the end of Miami's "Third World Nation," Tancredo's message overcame Winter's voice of moderation.

Tom Tancredo didn't need his 2008 presidential bid to put him on the national stage. His strong rhetoric on the issue of illegal immigration had already put him in the national limelight. He also didn't need help in winning the general election against the virtually unknown Democrat Bill Winter in 2006. He was the incumbent in a safe Republican district (voting 2 to 1 for Republicans in the last election) – like most incumbents, he could have easily kept a low profile and easily coasted to victory. Yet he chose to continue his self-appointed role as champion of an extreme position against illegal immigration that even most in the Republican party found distasteful. Tancredo is for "full-enforcement" of immigration, meaning the eventual deportation of an estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the United States.

Who:

Tom Tancredo is a former high school history teacher who ran for the Colorado House of Representatives and served two terms (1977-1981). He was vehemently opposed to bilingual education in the 1970s. Tancredo was appointed by President Reagan in 1981 to be the regional representative in Denver for the Department of Education. After working at a conservative think tank in Colorado, he was elected to Congress in 1998 and served four terms, despite promising that he would only serve three.

Bill Winter was also a high school teacher after serving in the Marines and at the TOPGUN naval school as a civilian contractor. He was one of at least 30 Democratic military veterans running in the 2006 election to unseat vulnerable Republicans.

Campaign:

A virtual unknown, Winter offered himself up as a viable alternative to Tancredo's harsh rhetoric and single-mindedness on the issue of illegal immigration. His status as a veteran apparently did not get traction with Colorado voters. Early polling was encouraging for Winter, showing him to be competitive, but Tancredo's incumbency advantage and Winter's low profile combined to give Tancredo a landslide. Winter hoped his military experience and opposition to the Iraq War would pull some voters to his side – he also explored the themes of non-partisanship (we should “salute the flag, not the donkey or elephant”). But Tancredo continued to hammer on his traditional issues, and the voters made a clear statement that they were with him.

Winter tried to make Tancredo's more outrageous statements come back to haunt him. Specifically, Tancredo was quoted as saying that American should retain the option of bombing Muslim holy sites like Mecca as a deterrent to terrorist attacks. Tancredo was known for using terms that cast many immigrants as criminal. In one speech in 2005, he said in a 2005 New Hampshire speech that illegal immigrants “need to be found before it is too late. They're coming here to kill you, and you, and me, and my grandchildren.”

When race came in:

Race was a factor in the campaign from the start because Tancredo had a history of racially inflammatory remarks. He has referred to the city of Miami as a “Third World nation,” drawing the ire of Republican Florida Governor Jeb Bush. Tancredo did not let up after winning the 2006 race in November. In January 2007 Tancredo called for the end of ethnic-based caucuses in Congress (including the Congressional Black Caucus, the Democratic Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Republican Congressional Hispanic Conference).

Winter's counter-strategy:

Winter did not counter Tancredo's racial rhetoric by “outing it,” but rather by saying that Tancredo was seeking to make “criminals out of good people.” “I refuse to stand by while decent people are attacked for the benefit of someone's political ambitions,” he told one interviewer. [1] This softer counterattack did not seem to be effective. He did not directly accuse Tancredo of playing on racial fears to promote his pet issue – perhaps out of a fear of backlash from voters if he did make such an accusation.

Lessons learned:

- **In a safe district, it's easy to be outspoken on the issue of race.** Assured of a Republican majority in his district, Tancredo had more leeway to play on racial fears through continued associations between immigrants and criminals.

- **Race gets you national attention quickly.** Tancredo didn't become a national figure because he decided to take leadership on the immigration issue. His extreme rhetoric, and his criticism of Bush's border security (which apparently did not please Karl Rove and company in the White House), were what propelled him into the limelight. A Congressman from an otherwise unnoticed district in Colorado figured out he could become noticed by bringing race into the debate and the fear of the influx of illegals.
- **Without "outing" the race-based rhetoric, there is no counter-strategy.** Winter's debate on the issues was not enough. Tancredo consistently denied using racial fears to his advantage, and claimed he just advocated "full enforcement" of immigration laws. As long as he has this cover, his seat is safe.

Note: Tancredo has announced that he will not run for reelection to Congress in 2008. It will be interesting to see whether immigration is still a hotly debated issue between two new contenders in his district. On December 20, 2007, Tancredo announced that he was stepping out of the 2008 presidential race after his longshot campaign that had foundered badly in polls.

9

NAGIN vs. LANDRIEU 2006 MAYOR OF NEW ORLEANS Ray Nagin (D) defeats Mitch Landrieu (D)

Abstract

The 2006 April mayoral election in New Orleans brought 22 candidates to the field plus the beleaguered incumbent Ray Nagin. A few months into the recovery from the Hurricane Katrina disaster, Nagin faced criticism from all sides about how he had managed the city's evacuation. But after Nagin named New Orleans a "Chocolate City" that would be "chocolate again," race became an important issue in the campaign. Nagin's rhetoric throughout the campaign created an "us vs. them" dynamic that arguably brought black voters out in droves not through benign solidarity, but through a form of resentment-driven racial competition. He eventually beat the sitting Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu by four points, grabbing 80% of the black vote (he had only mustered 40% of the black vote in 2002).

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin has never been accused of reticence. Some attribute part of his political success to his frankness, but others think some of

his speeches have exacerbated existing racial tensions arising from the Hurricane Katrina disaster and the federal response to it. But the racial breakdown of the vote in his two successful mayoral campaigns, in 2002 and 2006, is compelling evidence that race played a big part in the campaign. In 2002 Nagin won with 59% of the vote, including 85% of the white vote and 40% of the black vote. In 2006 Nagin beat sitting Lieutenant Governor Mary Landrieu 52 in a May runoff vote% to 48% – but this time he captured 80% of the black vote and only 20% of white voters.

Who:

Ray Nagin, a native New Orleansian and African American, was a virtual unknown and had not run for political office before his first mayoral run in 2002. Prior to that he was a vice president at Cox Communications (a cable company) and surprised everyone when he led in the first round of voting, then beat Police Chief Richard Pennington in the runoff. He ran on a reformist platform, pledging to undo much of the corruption in city politics and run the city as a business manager would.

Mitch Landrieu is part of a well-known political family including his sister Mary, a U.S. Senator and his father Moon, the mayor of New Orleans from 1970 to 1978. He won his race for Lieutenant Governor in 2003 and was reelected in 2007.

Campaign:

The Katrina aftermath was still the dominant feature of the political landscape in 2006 – in fact, the hurricane had postponed the 2006 election from February 2006 to April. Nagin had been harshly criticized by some for his response during the crisis, especially when dozens of city buses stood idle in a part of the city that was among the first to be flooded.

When race came in:

On Martin Luther King Day (Jan. 16), 2006 the mayor gave a speech with racial references that antagonized some New Orleansians. He repeated an observation he had made three days before on National Public Radio that New Orleans was a “Chocolate City,” adding that one day it would be “chocolate again.” He also said, “I don't care what people are saying Uptown or wherever they are,” an obvious reference to a mostly wealthy, white area of the city. In case he hadn't made himself clear, Nagin said that New Orleans “will be a majority African-American city. It's the way God wants it to be. He added that “God is mad at America,” specifically “black America” because “We're not taking care of ourselves.” Many thought he had just ruined his chances at re-election, but in fact he may have done just the opposite.

After the appropriate apologies, it was clear that Nagin had lost much of the white vote that had helped him win in 2002. But Nagin continued to bring race into the discussion. In the early days of the campaign, speaking in Houston to

the NAACP and a number of displaced New Orleansians, Nagin said, "There was all this talk about this being an opportunity to change New Orleans forever and maybe everybody shouldn't come back, and maybe this is an opportunity to kind of change New Orleans and go back to what it used to be. I have 23 candidates running for mayor and very few of them look like us." Nagin's comment wasn't inaccurate, but certainly made race a focal point for the campaign.

Many African-American voters living out of the state were bussed in by activist groups, and this further helped Nagin. Nagin won the first round of voting with 38% of the vote to Landrieu's 29%, then won the May runoff election by about 4,000 votes, 52% to 48%. There was a dramatic shift in the racial vote breakdown from the 2002 election, with Nagin taking 80% of black voters and 20% of white voters. Nagin successfully used racial issues and frank talk to activate a base he didn't even know he had.

Nagin remains a controversial figure and has since made other statements that some consider racially divisive. He has received heavy criticism for recent crime waves in the city and the city's foundering economic redevelopment efforts.

Landrieu's counter-strategy:

The Lieutenant Governor did not offer much response, hoping Nagin's verbal gaffes would help him. Without offering any alternative plan to the African American population that was so disproportionately affected by the Katrina disaster, Landrieu could not muster a majority.

Lessons learned:

- **A race play can also be targeted at boosting black turnout.** The use of race in campaigns need not only be an appeal to voters' prejudice. Nagin effectively used an attention-getting tactic that showed his African American constituents that he stood by them. While he in turn may have antagonized many of his white supporters, this strategy was the winning way in 2006.
- **Introducing race into a campaign can create a racial divide in the electoral outcome.** It's no coincidence that the black vote split 80-20 in favor of Nagin, while in 2002 he only received 40% of the black vote. Campaigns can become racialized through intentional or unintentional rhetoric, which sometimes works to one candidate's advantage.
- **National attention may create a rally effect in the African American population.** The New Orleans race received an unusual amount of national attention because of its proximity to Katrina, and Nagin was perceived by many voters as taking undue blame from federal and state authorities. Nagin successfully cast himself as a frank but beleaguered black politician facing criticism from mostly white voices. His

acknowledgment of New Orleans as a “Chocolate City” sounded divisive to whites but resonated with many African Americans.

- **Whether a tactic reflects an appeal to bigotry or to unacceptable divisiveness requires a mix of subjective and objective judgments, with the ultimate test being the reactions of voters.** Nagin and his defenders argue that although his tactics were perceived by many whites (and others) as unacceptably divisive and even bigoted, that perception was not shared by most of the African American community. (The evidence for that is his overwhelming support there.) But which perceptions matter more? Or, indeed, should the test for condemning a tactic depend on what we know or infer about *motive*? Because the ultimate question concerns perceptions of and the effects on *voters*, the motive of the card-player should not determine whether we condemn the tactic. We should aspire to a politics in which reasonable voters of any race would judge a tactic as benign, i.e., not appealing to base racial sentiments.

Another conundrum in the Nagin case concerns appeals to community solidarity or pride. While these may be benign, it seems fair to aspire, again, to a kind of politics in which any such appeals would not be rooted in fear, prejudice, stereotypes or resentment. If this is the test, then Nagin’s tactics warrant recognition as among the Dirty Dozen.

10

WASHINGTON vs. EPTON 1983 MAYOR OF CHICAGO

Harold Washington (D) defeats Bernard Epton (R)

The 1983 Chicago Mayoral race between former House Representative Harold Washington and former House Representative Bernard Epton marks a low point in American race relations, and is one of the last blatant examples of race rioting affecting an election. Racist factions in Chicago embraced the fairly moderate Epton as the only choice against African American and rising star Washington; third-party ads entreated voters, “Epton: Before It’s Too Late” subsequent to a frenzied race riot at a Washington campaign stop in Epton territory. Washington responded with calls for temperance but tried to rise above the fray, ultimately fending off the aggressive attacks. Race card loses.

Who:

Harold Washington was an African American Illinois state representative from 1966 to 1980, then a member of the U.S. Congress from 1981 to 1983. He was initially part of the powerful political machine that supported Mayor Richard Daley, but later broke with the Cook County Democratic establishment and formed a coalition of support built primarily on the black and growing Hispanic communities. In 1980 he ran as an independent candidate in the Illinois 1st District (the South Side) and defeated the official Democratic candidate. In Congress, Washington became identified with black issues, especially the battle to extend the protections against discrimination offered by the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Bernard Epton also served in the Illinois House of Representatives, and would have become the city's first Jewish mayor, and its first Republican mayor since 1931. A resident of the tony Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago, Epton had previously marched in MLK's memory in Memphis but was embraced by conservative voters.

Richard M. Daley, the son of the former mayor (who was largely dependent on conservative ethnic voters).

Mayor Jane M. Byrne had largely alienated her black support but entered the race late as a write-in candidate to "unite the city" under increasingly contentious race conditions.

Campaign Consultants:

– **Washington**

Campaign manager: Gus Savage

Organizer/finance: Sid Ordower

– for **Epton**

Media consultants: John Deardourff of Bailey-Deardourff devised slogan: "Epton... Before It's Too Late." Arthur Finkelstein

Campaign:

The contest opened up Democratic Party divisions as Walter Mondale backed Daley and Edward Kennedy backed Byrne. Washington received support from Jesse Jackson, a longtime opponent of the Daley machine. Washington won the primary, and began to take on the party machine based on previous lack of support and deciding that the party wanted him to be a secondary candidate; he promised to end "patronage perks." Powerful party Democrats began abandoning Washington to support Epton. Byrne entered the race as the situation grew more contentious between the campaigns.

Mobilization of the black vote proved crucial for Washington's win in the

primary, with 37% (80% of it black voters), with Byrne at 33% and Daley 30%. Byrne appeared to get most of the Hispanic vote, while whites were split between Byrne and Daley.

The general election was equally contentious, but Washington prevailed with 51.4%, compared to Epton's 48.3%. Voter turnout was 82%, one of highest in Chicago's history.

Polling two weeks before the election, Washington led with a 14-point spread; that lead held until three days before the election. Washington was, in fact, elected with only a four-point margin. Believed to be an example of the "(Douglas) Wilder effect" or "(Tom) Bradley effect" in which statistically significant numbers of whites report a likely vote for the black candidate or undecided, when in fact the voter votes for the white candidate. In certain, traditionally Democratic, white ethnic neighborhoods of Chicago, Epton out-pollled Washington 15 to 1. Epton came within 40,000 votes (of 1.2 million cast) of defeating the Democratic nominee. His total was the high-water mark for Chicago Republicans in elections for mayor in the heavily Democratic city. Epton received 90% of the votes of Chicago whites, and 3% from blacks.

Where race came in:

In the two weeks following Byrne's entry into the race, racial literature from outside the Epton campaign surfaced, and the race was recast on primarily racial tones, with racial divisions rapidly exposed in the community. At a campaign stop at St. Pascal's Catholic Church in an Epton-leaning parish, Walter Mondale campaigned with Washington. They were confronted with a large and very aggressive anti-Washington crowd, which shouted "crook" and "tax cheat" at the campaigners; video crews covered the "frenzied crowd" as "N*** die" was spray painted on the wall.

Many white Democrats switched their vote to Epton as racial overtones infused the campaign. The city was divided into white conservatives and working class minorities, especially the previously fragmented black community that rallied behind Washington.

The Epton campaign produced a TV ad, "Epton: Before It's Too Late," which outlined a number of the same charges of tax fraud and unethical dealings against Washington; the cumulatively effect was damaging. The "Before It's Too Late" tag line was an implicit statement to conservative Epton supporters to stop an African American from becoming the Mayor. Epton claimed the ad was a warning against a pending fiscal collapse instead of a racist appeal. Other incidents included T-shirts created outside the Epton campaign that read, "Vote right, vote white;" buttons portrayed a watermelon with a black slash across it, or an all-white button with no words.

Washington's counter-strategy:

The Washington campaign countered by making commercials of the St. Pascal's riot: "A Vote You Can Be Proud Of," but he chose not to address the implicit and explicit race strategies of the other side. Washington addressed traditional issues of police, taxes, schools while having to discuss particulars on personal elements (failure to file tax returns, unpaid bills, suspension from law practice). The Washington campaign stuck to a classic partisan appeal and failed to directly address the racist attacks. The Epton campaign maintained the offensive with a steady barrage of exaggerated charges: tax cheat, disbarred lawyer, convicted felon (in reality, a misdemeanor for not filing taxes). The personal attacks on the character of a black candidate had the probably intended effect of playing into stereotypes of blacks as unethical criminals.

Lessons learned:

- **Failing to counter implicitly racist attacks may divide the electorate by race even further.** Washington's strategy to ignore the attacks and focus on traditional issues ultimately cost him much of the white electorate and nearly the election.
- **Race in urban elections is still a hot-button issue.** While this case comes from the 1980s, cities remain racially divided, and this divide can translate into a divided electorate if a campaign becomes racialized as the Washington-Epton one did.
- **An African American candidate may be more vulnerable to character attacks than a white candidate.** Epton was quick to go negative, capitalizing on sordid details of Washington's life. While one could say, "That's politics," the "before it's too late" message of Epton's negative campaign took on a different tone than a normal ad hominem attack.



DINKINS vs. KOCH 1989
MAYOR OF NEW YORK, PRIMARY
David Dinkins (D) defeats incumbent Ed Koch (D)

Abstract

As the 1989 New York City election approached, popular but controversial mayor Ed Koch announced his candidacy for a third term of office, a feat only LaGuardia and Robert Wagner had previously accomplished. New York remained the last of America's ten largest cities to elect an African American Mayor, and Jesse Jackson's 1988

presidential campaign had demonstrated that a black politician supported by a coalition of blacks, Hispanics and white liberals could successfully compete in New York City. Democrat David Dinkins, the African American Manhattan Borough President, challenged Koch for the Democratic nomination.

Who:

First elected in 1977, **Edward Koch**, the Greenwich Village reformer, won the mayor's seat with a broad coalition of white liberals, African Americans, Hispanics, and outer borough Jews. Koch's policies and rhetoric grew more conservative over the course of his administration, the result of a strategy to attract more middle class Catholic voters, even at the risk of losing some white liberal and African American support. Koch's shift was a deliberate one: he reasoned white liberals had no other viable candidates to support and that his fiscal policies would resonate with middle class minority voters. This approach was successful in attracting some middle-class minority votes; Koch increased his share of the Hispanic and black vote between the 1981 and 1985 elections, when he fared well in middle class minority neighborhoods.

David Dinkins, the African American challenger, rose through the Democratic party ranks, serving in the New York State legislature and later as Manhattan Borough President in 1985. Dinkins' low key style and his mild-mannered appearance contrasted with the more polarizing persona of Koch.

Campaign Consultants:

– Dinkins

Campaign Manager: Bill Lynch

Media consultant: Bob Shrum, who later advised Bob Kerrey, Al Gore and John Kerry.

– for Koch

Campaign Manager: Paul Crotty

Media/political strategist: David Garth

Campaign:

On Election Day, voters doubted the charismatic, but bombastic Koch could ease the racial tension that had enveloped the city. Voters felt that Dinkins, and his vision of city reunification was more likely to bring crime under control and restore respect in the black community for political authority. Dinkins won the Democratic nomination with 51% of the vote.

Koch had won his second term handily, but three key factors combined to alter the electoral landscape between the 1985 and 1989 elections: the city's shifting demographics, increasing economic polarization and heightening racial tension. Hispanic and African American voters increased as percentage of the

electorate, while white voters making up the base of Mayor Koch's electoral coalition declined. At the same time, income polarization in the city accelerated, causing downward mobility for many Hispanic voters and shearing them away from Koch's coalition. These voters became more likely to identify with the economic situation of African Americans, rendering them more open to appeals that stressed the similarities between the two groups.

Finally, several incidences of white-on-black or black-on-white violence and the mayor's subsequent reaction served to fuel racial tension in the city. The first among these was a much publicized subway vigilante incident, in which Bernard Goetz shot four African American men who were attempting to mug him on the subway. Koch first condemned the vigilantism, then defended Goetz's right to defend himself, praising the first grand jury for refusing to indict the gunman. Koch later commented tongue-in-cheek that the best way to eliminate subway graffiti would be to release wolves into the Queens subway switch yard.

Several other cases – including a beating of African American Michael Griffith by a white crowd, the Central Park jogger “wilding” case, and the Yuseph Hawkins beating and homicide in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn by white youths – raised racial tensions in the city to unprecedented levels. Koch reacted to each event with the requisite outrage, but black constituents in the city were not appeased.

Koch asked African Americans not to protest after the Bensonhurst incident in order to avoid antagonizing neighborhood residents, saying “Black politicians and ministers were wrong to hold demonstrations at Bensonhurst.” Koch later added, “It's just as wrong to march at Bensonhurst as it would be to march in Harlem after that young woman in the jogging case.” Koch's request was taken as a serious affront to the minority community.

Dinkins' counter-strategy:

Meanwhile challenger Dinkins appealed for calm from the black community and pledged to let peaceful demonstrations take place throughout the city. Dinkins' appeals for calm were perceived as a sensible reaction to the situation.

Sensing the electorate's frustration with increasing racial tension, Dinkins positioned himself as a racial healer, employing the slogan “vote your hopes, not your fears.” He actively cultivated a calmer, less racially polarizing persona than his rivals, cultivating an image that lead analysts to call him an early crossover politician. Dinkins requested of the press at his first conference, “You don't want racial strife. I'm going to rely on you for that,” and he famously called the city a “gorgeous mosaic,” an image that appealed to Hispanic voters and other minorities who had previously been left out of the debate.

Dinkins also worked to assuage white voters' fears that a black mayor would lead to a “black takeover” in city hall. Dinkins adopted the slogan “strong

enough to hold the line,” which subtly communicated that he wasn’t afraid to take on the city’s crime wave.

Lessons learned:

- **Avoid ad hominem attacks to stay above the fray.** Dinkins studiously avoided personal attacks on Koch, which made it easier for Koch to lend Dinkins his endorsement in the general election.
- **As an African American candidate, you can take the lead in being “racial healer.”** Dinkins effectively took credit for being the sensible alternative when his opponent was busy making high-profile verbal gaffes.
- **Stay tough on crime while staying away from rhetoric that links crime only to minorities.** Dinkins did not alienate white voters worried about rising crime rates and violence by defending criminals, no matter what their race.
- **See the race in more than two colors.** Hispanic and other minority voters were an essential part of the winning coalition.

1 2

ROS-LEHTINEN vs. RICHMAN 1989 CONGRESSIONAL SEAT, FLORIDA

**Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R) defeats Gerald Richman (D) to fill
Claude Pepper’s seat**

Abstract

A race riot sparked when a Hispanic police officer shot an unarmed black person and Hispanics' emergence as a majority of the district's population set the stage for a racially-charged political environment. The Republican National Committee Chair Lee Atwater added fuel to the fire by calling the seat a “Cuban-American” seat. Democratic candidate Richman responded by calling the seat an “American seat,” which critics perceived as a slight to Cuban Americans. Democrat Richman went on to garner almost all of the white and African American vote, while State Senator and Cuban-American Ileana Ros-Lehtinen won the seat with the support of almost all Cuban-American voters.

The death of popular Democratic Representative Claude Pepper in 1989 created a vacancy in Florida’s 18th Congressional seat for the first time in 27 years. The Miami-based district had undergone substantial demographic changes since the seat was last competitive — Cuban Americans now comprised more than 50%

of the population and were playing a more active role in local elections. Racial tensions in the district were running especially high because of recent race riots in Overtown, Florida that followed an incident in which a Hispanic police officer shot an African American man.

Who:

Popular Cuban-American state senator **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** easily won the Republican primary with 82% of the vote in a four-person race. After winning Pepper's seat, she became the first Hispanic woman (and Cuban American of either gender) to hold a seat in Congress.

The democratic primary was heavily contested by three strong candidates:

- Prominent Miami attorney **Gerald Richman**, a white man with no political experience and no name recognition, but whose personal wealth enabled him to offset these disadvantages.
- **Jo Ann Pepper**, a member of a local political dynasty who entered the race with high name recognition.
- Cuban-American Miami City Commissioner **Rosario Kennedy**, who enjoyed a great deal of support from Miami's Cuban community.

Campaign:

Ros-Lehtinen eventually won the seat 53% to 47%, but the real story of the campaign is best shown by the vote's racial breakdown. Richman prevailed among African-American and Caucasian voters by 96% and 88% respectively, while Ros-Lehtinen carried 94% of Hispanic votes. This ethnic split of the vote resulted from differing interpretations of Richman's claim that the seat was "an American seat."

Where race came in:

Both the Democratic primary race and the ensuing general election were infused with undercurrents of ethnic tension. Racial factors in the race became explicit when, Republican Committee Chairman Lee Atwater told the Cuban American National Foundation either, "We need to elect a Cuban American to the United States Congress," as he remembers saying, or that the seat "belongs to a Cuban American," as several news outlets quoted him.

Republican Ros-Lehtinen immediately disavowed the remark, and one Democratic challenger quit the race after concluding Atwater's comment had made it impossible for her to run without appearing to attack the large Cuban-American population.⁷ Another Democratic contender, Kennedy, remarked that she had no problem with the comment as long as she was the Cuban-American to hold the seat. In response, another Democratic contender, Richman, shifted his message to include saying, "This is not a Cuban American

seat, this is not a Jewish seat, this is not a black seat, this is an American seat," and his campaign slogan became, "For All the People."

Many in the media labeled this strategy an implicit use of race-baiting. Richman maintained that he was merely responding to Atwater's comment, which Richman considered to be racially polarizing.

Richman and Kennedy entered a runoff for the Democratic nomination, and Richman continued using the "American Seat" message. A local fair elections nonprofit reprimanded Richman for this message, writing, "Since Ms. Kennedy is not, to the best of our knowledge, campaigning as the 'Cuban American candidate,' we fail to see any need for your continuation of this theme." Richman responded to similar concerns in an interview with the Miami Herald, saying, "The whole theme of my campaign is to try to unify the whole community. It's been my successful message through the entire campaign. ... If someone raises an ethnic issue and you come back and say it shouldn't be an ethnic seat, how could anybody complain about that?"

Kennedy's counter-strategy:

Kennedy, the Cuban-American City Commissioner made the issue explicit, telling the Miami Herald, "His hope is to get the Anglos, the Jewish voters and the black voters to come out for him. There are very serious undertones to his wording – that this is an American seat." The Dade County Fair Election Practices Committee agreed, saying, "Anyone who remembers recent Dade County political history knows that past Anglo candidates have used various versions of the all-American theme as a way of reminding voters that they were running against a Cuban American opponent. I'm not saying that that is the Richman campaign's purpose, but it's something we feel he should avoid."

DFCPC chairman, Parker Thomson, joined the fray, commenting "He's saying in effect, 'I'm not a Cuban-American and therefore those who do not want a Cuban-American to be elected to the seat should vote for me.' I assume that's how it's to be interpreted. I see no other purpose for it." And the Miami Herald weighed in with an editorial entitled, "It's bigotry, sir."

Richman's counter-counter-strategy:

For his part, Richman continued with his message running radio spots saying, "It's sad when politicians try to win elections by dividing people, by pitting one group against another. But it's happening right here in Miami. Republican Chairman Lee Atwater is telling us that Claude Pepper's seat in Congress belongs to one ethnic group." A similar TV spot intoned, "Lee Atwater says this is an ethnic seat. Gerald Richman believes it's an American seat – in the Claude Pepper tradition."

Richman won the Democratic nomination easily, garnering 60% of the vote, but only 24% of the crucial Cuban-American vote. Richman's poor showing with Cuban-Americans did not bode well for the general election, since nearly 45% of voters in the district report Cuban-American roots. The racial divide was striking: When asked if the Richman campaign was bigoted against Cuban Americans, 82% of Cuban-Americans answered yes, but only five% of Jewish voters agreed. Forty-eight% of all voters felt the Richman campaign was bigoted, while 37% said the campaign was not bigoted and 15% remained unsure.

Lessons learned:

- **Perception matters** – Whether Richman intended to play the race card or not remains ambiguous, but significant community voting blocs perceived racism in his slogan. This perception led them to vote in polarized demographic blocs.
- **Demographics matter** – When voters perceive the rhetoric of a campaign to be racist, voters tend to vote in ethnic blocs. Changing demographics in this district were decisive to the Republican victory.
- **Race-card counter-attack plays are party-blind** – a Republican can effectively cast a Democrat as bigoted by focusing on the rhetoric. Sensing Richman's political weakness on this issue, Ros-Lehtinen adopted a somewhat surprising response, labeling Richman a "racist" running a "bigoted" campaign, and refusing to debate him, based on principle. In her statement, Ros-Lehtinen said, "Principle is more important than political gain, and a seat in Congress is not worth dignifying for even a moment Gerald Richman's racist view of America or of me. I will not dignify the bigoted campaign of Gerald Richman by appearing with him at any event, forum, or debate." The perception of Ros-Lehtinen's decision was split along ethnic lines; 89% of Cuban Americans thought she was justified, while only five% of Jewish voters agreed.
- **A race-based message that works in the primary won't necessarily work in the general election.** Richman's move was not supported by the Cuban American population, many of whom (as registered Republicans) did not get to vote in the Democratic primary. When he ran up against a Hispanic candidate in the general election, his words came back to haunt him.

1 3

A BAKER'S DOZEN HYMIETOWN, MACACA, AND CLEAN AND NICE-LOOKING AN ASSORTMENT OF VERBAL GAFFES

Assorted Verbal Gaffes on Race that Made a Difference, 1984-2006

There is a special kind of race-based incident in campaigns that is seen often but can't be characterized as an intentional "race play" in a campaign. These are the verbal gaffes that come out of candidates' mouths when their brains temporarily disconnect from their speech. Often there is a stir in media coverage, a quick apology, and a hope by the candidate that within weeks there is something new to talk about. Other times, there may be a long-term effect — either by reminding the general public that race and even prejudice lies just below the surface, ready to pop out when a candidate makes a misstep, or by permanently coloring the public's view of a candidate, even changing election results.

There are far too many verbal gaffes to document, but we highlight three emblematic gaffes that point to a campaign reality: candidates are human, and humans have prejudice. And that prejudice may come out, usually through implicit messages, but often in explicit "oops" moments, during campaigns. Why are these important? They remind us that race continues to be an extremely sensitive subject in campaigns, and when it is brought front-and-center by media coverage of these verbal errors, there can be a real effect, intended or not. Often the backlash against such explicit race-baiting veils another more sinister possibility: that the racial slurs or stereotypes depicted by candidates may have thousands of people nodding their heads in agreement.

Jesse Jackson (D), Hymietown, 1984:

In 1984 Jesse Jackson was running for president and impressed many by winning a sizable number of primary votes (21%) if not delegates (8%). But the campaign was marred by his comments in January of that year to Washington Post reporter (an African American) Milton Coleman, which were reported by another Post reporter. He admitted later to calling Jews "Hymies" and referring to New York as a "Hymietown." Later, Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan gave the story more legs when, trying to show support for Jackson, he addressed this statement to the Jewish community: "If you harm this brother [Jackson], it will be the last one you harm." In an apology a month later in a New Hampshire synagogue, Jackson tried to close the book on the incident. But the incident may have caused a permanent rift between Jackson and Jewish

Democrats he may have needed for his political future.

George Allen (R), Macaca, 2006:

"This fellow here, over here with the yellow shirt, macaca, or whatever his name is. He's with my opponent. He's following us around everywhere. And it's just great. ... Let's give a welcome to Macaca, here. Welcome to America and the real world of Virginia."

This was Virginia Senator George Allen's ill-fated joke made to a crowd of supporters as he pointed out a 20-year-old volunteer for his opponent's campaign (Jim Webb) who was of Indian descent. Allen claimed later that he hadn't known what macaca meant (reportedly a term for "monkey" or a European racial slur against African immigrants), and he immediately apologized. But the video of his gaffe quickly made the rounds on the Internet and became a national news story.

The damage was done before Allen could react — his campaign manager did not help matters by initially dismissing the comment and saying his candidate had "nothing to apologize for. Allen lost his 2006 reelection bid to Jim Webb a few months later by the slimmest of margins (0.4%) after holding a sizable incumbent advantage in early polls. Few believe the "macaca" incident was the only factor in his loss, but it cannot be ignored as an important event in the campaign and Allen's political life. In December 2006 Allen announced that he would not be a presidential contender in 2008, despite rumors before the 2006 election that he would.

Joe Biden (D), Clean, Articulate and Nice-Looking, 2007:

"I mean, you got the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy ... I mean, that's a storybook, man."

Joe Biden is another politician who has never been known for his reticence. The outspoken senator from Delaware has made scores of comments that he would probably wish he could take back. The description of his presidential opponent Barack Obama is at the top of his list. On the day Biden launched his presidential bid for 2008, he also stuck his foot in his mouth but acting as if an African American candidate who was clean (he later corrected that to "fresh" on Jon Stewart's Daily Show) and articulate was a rarity.

Though the backlash was relatively minor at the time, it was not a good start to Biden's campaign, which has floundered ever since. Race became a factor in Biden's campaign simply because his opponent was African American and Biden chose the wrong words. His miscue put other candidates on notice: racial stereotypes are out there, people are extra-sensitive to them when a campaign involves a minority candidate, and it's best to stay away from them at all costs.

Lessons learned:

- **In the YouTube era, when video and/or audio of every word a candidate says publicly can be instantly posted on the Internet, racial verbal gaffes are a serious danger.** The Allen and Biden gaffes most likely would have never become news stories in another decade, when technology could not have made their remarks available as fuel for public outrage.
- **The freedom to respond to racially sensitive rhetoric is at an all-time high. There is a positive and negative aspect to this.** On one hand, we have moved beyond a time when candidates could explicitly use racial epithets and reporters might laugh it off and not report it. On the other hand, any remark that is even close to being racially insensitive can set off a firestorm and make a campaign more about a candidate's personal views on race than any policy issue.
- **Gaffes are a party-neutral phenomenon.** Democrats and Republicans alike are prone to these gaffes. If the gaffes expose a hidden "old" way of thinking about race or deeply buried prejudices, candidates from both sides of the aisle are exhibiting them.
