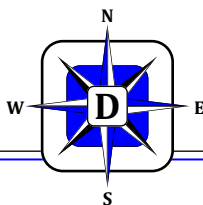


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Racial Prisms: Unwanted Family Heirlooms

Healthcare reform is Not a Black/White Issue; it's a Liberal/Conservative Issue

John N. Davis, President

*John Davis Political Report is an in-depth summary of the key political trends impacting North Carolina politics. Following an **introductory period during October**, the report will be copyrighted and available exclusively to subscribers. See details: www.johndavisconsulting.com. John Davis has followed NC politics for 23 years, serving as President of NCFREE, a political research group, where he was Editor of the **Almanac of North Carolina Politics**. As head of John Davis Consulting, Davis specializes in tracking political trends and forecasting.*

*"I think an **overwhelming portion** of the intensely demonstrated animosity toward President Barack Obama is based on the fact that he is a black man ... that he's African American."*¹

*Former President Jimmy Carter, NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams,
 September 15, 2009*

Former President Jimmy Carter stirred up a hornet's nest in September when he stated that an "overwhelming portion" of the anti-Obama crowd is motivated by racism. Former President Bill Clinton weighed in on Carter's comment, saying, "I believe that 100 percent of those who are opposing him [Obama] now would be against him if he were a white Democrat."²

President Obama himself dismissed Carter's observation, telling Dave Letterman on CBS' *The Late Show*, "I think it's important to realize that I was actually black *before the election*."³

It's also important to realize that Obama was actually the "Most Liberal" member of the U.S. Senate *before the election*. Since 1981, the *National Journal* has rated where members of Congress stand ideologically by compiling votes in three areas: economic issues, social issues, and foreign policy. Obama's 2007 composite liberal score was 95.5%; conservative 4.5%.⁴

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9b5xoUHCBsk>

² http://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/clinton_obama_republicans/2009/09/21/262884.html

³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmE7tuR0364>

⁴ http://www.nationaljournal.com/voteratings/sen/lib_cons.htm?o1=lib_composite&o2=desc#results

Healthcare Reform Combatants: Demographic Profile

So, who are the groups for or against Obama's healthcare reform legislation? According to a national poll released by *Gallup* September 24, 2009,⁵ "In general, the largest differences in support for new health care legislation by subgroup are based on the political variables of *party and ideology*. Democrats and liberals are highly likely to support it, while conservatives and Republicans are primarily against it." For emphasis: It's about party and ideology.

Age/Healthcare Reform: "The youngest Americans, aged 18-29, favor it by a 13 point margin. Support is more evenly divided among Americans 30-64, while those 65 and older are opposed by a 10 point margin."

Party/Healthcare Reform: "Partisanship remains a strong predictor of support for healthcare, even among older Americans. While it makes sense that older Republicans are overwhelmingly opposed to healthcare reform, older Democrats still on balance favor it, though not to the same extent that younger Democrats do."

Gender/Healthcare Reform: Men and women are a mirror image on healthcare reform. "Women favor it (40% 'For;' 33% 'Against'), while men are opposed (33% 'For;' 44% 'Against')."

The bottom line is that differences of opinion on healthcare reform follow patterns of partisanship. "Women, minorities, those with low incomes, and those with either postgraduate degrees or low levels of education are most likely to identify as Democrats. All of these groups are also proportionately most likely to favor a new health care law," Gallup concludes.

What President Carter sees as angry white bigots venting their rage at a black president, are actually angry white conservatives venting their rage at a president who happens to be black; conservatives who are mad as hell at what they see as the threat of liberal ideology coming out of this White House, particularly on the issues of spending, accountability, and healthcare reform.

The Inherited Burden of Racial Prisms

In 2003, while conducting research for a book I'm writing, *The Fall of the Magnolia Curtain*,⁶ I interviewed Congressman Mel Watt, D-Mecklenburg, who was elected in 1992. Watt was the first African-American male elected to Congress in the 20th Century from North Carolina. The interview focused on the progress in race relations in the United States and the continued justification for affirmative action and racial gerrymandering. One month earlier, a racial incident was in the news involving North Carolina Republican Congressman Cass Ballenger.

Republican Ballenger had created a firestorm by calling African American Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, D-Georgia, a "bitch," after saying, "If I had to listen to her, I probably would have developed a little bit of segregationist feeling." Ballenger was already in hot water for displaying black-faced lawn jockeys at his home in Hickory.

⁵ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/123164/Seniors-Lean-Against-New-Healthcare-Law.aspx>

⁶ Excerpt from my book, *The Fall of the Magnolia Curtain*, to be published in 2010.

I was surprised when Congressman Watt said, *without defending Ballenger's behavior*, that he understood Ballenger. "Our generation, the baby boomers, inherited the burden of racism," he said, "We see day to day life through a racial prism handed down to us from our parents' generation." Then he added, "That's why I understand Cass."

Perhaps it is because I, too, inherited a racial prism, having been raised in the Florida Panhandle just below Georgia and Alabama, I understand how a fellow southerner, former President Jimmy Carter, could observe and conclude that an "overwhelming portion" of those rallying against President Barack Obama's healthcare reform agenda are racially motivated.

Thankfully, with every passing generation there are fewer and fewer racial prisms being passed down. For most, these racial prisms are being discarded like unwanted family heirlooms. But in Carter's childhood in the 1920s and 1930s, racism was the accepted way of life.

In his book, *An Hour Before Daylight*,⁷ Carter, born October 1, 1924, reminisces about growing up in rural Georgia, where work on his family's farm began each day an hour before daylight. On the issue of race Carter wrote, "Our two races, although inseparable in our daily lives, were kept apart by social custom, misinterpretation of the Holy Scriptures, and the unchallenged law of the land as mandated by the United States Supreme Court."

Carter says that throughout his boyhood and youth, "...the political and social dominance of whites was an accepted fact, never challenged or even debated, so far as I knew, by white liberals or black protestors." President Carter's generalization that most anti-Obama voters are racists was merely a momentary lapse into his past ... the Dark Ages of race relations in America.

Political Take Away for 2010: Those Who Play the Race Card Are Losing

The take away political lesson for 2010 is this: In politics or public policy, those who play the race card are always the ones who are losing; it's the last act of political desperation.

We saw that unfortunate act of desperation in last year's Democratic Primary slug-fest between State Treasurer Richard Moore and then-Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue. Surely Moore now regrets his TV ads suggesting that Perdue was soft on the KKK. Bill Clinton infuriated African Americans last year when he downplayed Obama's win over Hillary in South Carolina, by reminding everyone that Jesse Jackson won there in 1984 and 1988.

There is another take away noteworthy of consideration for 2010, and that is, as Congressman Mel Watt suggested, racial prisms are an inherited burden ... a burden shared by all of us without regard to party or political persuasion or race. Only today's young voters are exempt. However, like all burdens from our childhood, we owe it to ourselves and each other to overcome their destructive influences ... to ultimately discard them like musty, unwanted family heirlooms.

Taking a stand against a liberal president is a fair and a potentially effective argument for change in 2010. Democrats dismissing most conservative activists as racists is ... ummm, racist.

⁷ *An Hour Before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, by Jimmy Carter; Pg. 20. Simon & Schuster, 2001.