

they would refuse to vote for a Black for vice-president, and 18 percent said they would refuse to vote for a Black for president." Though the polling suggests that white resistance is still a serious obstacle, it does reflect a growing willingness to overlook race. Thirty years ago, 53 percent of the electorate said they would not support a qualified Black presidential candidate.

A comparison of Jackson's performance in 1984 and 1988 supports the polls' indications of progress. Among white Southerners, Jackson doubled his share of the vote, winning close to 10 percent this year. In other states, Jackson got as much as 20 and 30 percent of the white vote. Most analysts describe Jackson's white supporters as college-educated, middle-income liberals, a characterization disputed by Danny Cantor, Jackson's labor coordinator. That profile, Cantor says, is based on scanty exit poll data and ignores the farmers and workers who visibly identified with Jackson's populist message. The fact remains, however, that Jackson's highest white vote tallies were in states with few Black voters—Vermont, Maine, and Minnesota, for example. Where there is "racial tension and competition," Cantor acknowledged, it was difficult to win white working class votes.

The resistance to Black candidates is strongest at the mayoral level. The JCPS/Gallup poll found that in a contest between a Black and a white candidate for mayor, 55 percent of whites said they would vote for the white candidate based on race regardless of qualifications. "Mayoral campaigns involving Blacks tend to be quite divisive," ex-

plains Thomas Cavanagh, associate study director of the National Research Council's Committee on the Status of Black Americans. "It becomes kind of a symbolic watershed. For blacks, it represents the big breakthrough; for whites, it's seen as a loss of power."

#### Perils of Biracial Coalitions

Salim Muwakkil, writing in *In These Times*, found evidence of white backlash in the 1987 elections when Philadelphia Mayor Wilson Goode only held on by the skin of his teeth and Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt lost his bid for a third term, each because he lost a crucial share of the white vote. Noting that the white share of most Black mayors' vote totals fell, Muwakkil concluded: "The off-year contests confirmed that there is a growing polarization of the electorate. And this trend reinforces Blacks' suspicions that whites are conspiring to retake control of many cities now under African-American leadership."

Though Gantt was defeated by white voters switching to the Republican Party, the contest also saw a decrease in Black voter turnout. Julius L. Chambers, an attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, commented that "we have not gotten to the point where whites were able to vote for him based on his contributions to the community." But, he added, "Harvey had the problem of developing positions that cut across racial lines."

The Charlotte case illustrates the dilemma facing minority candidates elected by biracial coalitions: how to be accountable to both constituencies. "Black issues come into real strong competition with white issues," ob-

served Hardy Frye, an assistant to Gus Newport when he was mayor of Berkeley. Conflicts between anti-development and pro-jobs agendas, for example, frequently split the coalition that put Newport in office. "It is hard to work those out in a coalition when no one is willing to prioritize," Frye said. "People tend to give lip service to Black issues but in a lot of cases Black issues are so difficult to solve that people get tired of them." Frye and Newport tired of the conflicts and after two terms, Newport declined to run again.

The treacherous nature of electoral coalitions and mounting evidence of white backlash do not bode well for minority candidates with high political ambitions. Jesse Jackson may be "a little like John the Baptist," as Chicago Tribune columnist Clarence Page put it, paving the way for other Black politicians, but the way is likely to be parched and rocky for some time to come. Still, Jackson has changed the way many whites think of Blacks and, as Page said, "That may not mean that race doesn't matter anymore, but it's a healthy step in the right direction."

JCPS Political Trendletter, April 1988

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