



Brown Is the New White: How the Demographic Revolution Has Created a New American Majority

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Despite the abundant evidence from Obama's victories proving that the U.S. population has fundamentally changed, many progressives and Democrats continue to waste millions of dollars chasing white swing voters. Explosive population growth of people of color in America over the past fifty years has laid the foundation for a New American Majority consisting of progressive people of color (23 percent of all eligible voters) and progressive whites (28 percent of all eligible voters). These two groups make up 51 percent of all eligible voters in America right now, and that majority is growing larger every day. Failing to properly appreciate this reality, progressives are at risk of missing this moment in history—and losing.

A leader in national politics for thirty years, Steve Phillips has had a front-row seat to these extraordinary political changes. A civil rights lawyer and a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, Phillips draws on his extensive political experience to unveil exactly how people of color and progressive whites add up to a new majority, and what this means for U.S. politics and policy. A book brimming with urgency and hope, *Brown Is the New White* exposes how far behind the curve Democrats are in investing in communities of color—while illuminating a path forward to seize the opportunity created by the demographic revolution

Brown Is the New White: How the Demographic Revolution Has Created a New American Majority Details

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Lorilin says

This book wasn't at all what I was expecting, but, wow, it's powerful. I thought *Brown Is the New White* was going to read like a history book discussing the changing demographics in the United States, etc. And though that IS how author Steve Phillips begins the book, his main points go way beyond that.

Phillips reminds us that minorities are set to become the majority in the US in the very near future. (This is probably something most of us know by now.) As a group, they have enormous potential to influence the politics of this country. Phillips argues that this potential power isn't being properly harnessed--not by Democrats OR Republicans--and whichever political party gets to these people first, is probably going to be the side that wins elections. Since he is a Democrat, Phillips obviously wants his own party to attract as many minority voters as possible, especially since he believes that minority voters coupled with progressive White voters have some serious staying power and can change the future of this country RIGHT NOW.

Phillips argues pretty strongly that the Democratic Party is overly fixated on wooing undecided White voters. (This is a dynamic I didn't even know existed before reading this book.) Instead of wasting so many resources on trying to win over those undecided White voters, he believes that the Democratic Party should, instead, focus most of its attention, money, and time on winning over minority voters. And to do this, he argues that people of color should be in leadership positions (especially within campaigns), since they know what minority voters want and need. "Smart ass white boys," (as he calls them, eek), just don't have what it takes to understand and persuade minorities--so employ people of color on your campaign who do. "The fact remains," he says, "that the world of progressive politics is dominated by White men at a time when the future of the progressive movement depends on solidifying the support of the growing numbers of people of color in America." He makes a strong point.

Ultimately, this was an eye-opening read for me. Very well-written, nicely structured, and with clear and focused arguments. I only hope that Democrats DO make a concentrated effort to bring the soon-to-be majority minority voters to their side. It makes me hopeful to imagine what we can all accomplish together.

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Mehrsa says

A good, thorough and useful book, but it needs a serious post-2016 update. In a way, it was prescient--that Republicans can count people of color too. I just don't think demographics are going to shift as much as predicted because as recent research shows, a lot of latinos, asians, etc vote Republican and also within a few generations, they stop even identifying as people of color. So I guess I am not all that hopeful about just waiting for a majority minority nation. The progressives need to actually present a vision instead of just taking the black and brown vote for granted, which is what they have done.

Lizzie says

If you are interested in politics or communities of color, rad this book!!

Steve Phillips is a witty and engaging writer. He traces the history of oppression of communities of color in the US and connects it clearly to how we should be courting them as voters now. His main argument is that white swing voters are obsolete. Progressive whites + progressive communities of color =51% nationally.

Highly recommend!

Ran says

Steve Phillips argues against the current understanding of the demographic revolution in the United States which states that the white population will be the minority in 2044. According to Phillips, this theory "overlooks the equation that's been hiding in plain sight, one that shows what happens when you add together the number of *today's* people of color (the vast majority of whom are progressive) and progressive Whites. It's this calculation that reveals that *America has a progressive, multiracial majority right now* that has the power to elect presidents and reshape American politics, policies, and priorities for decades to come. Not in 2045. Not ten years down the road. Today."

That's fantastic but Phillips appears to overlook that this newly defined demographic has to vote together to accomplish change. He somewhat addresses this problem in his section, the New American Majority wherein he examines African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Arab Americans and Progressive Whites. The perspective found herein is extremely Democratic. When Phillips uses progressive, he does not trace its historical background either.

I liked Appendix C best: Recommended Reading.

Parker says

As someone who follows elections and is an activist in issues surrounding said elections, I would give this book to every Democrat in congress or who is even thinking of running.

Although I had a little trouble getting into the book, once I managed that, it was an easy, although very worthwhile read. Much of what he says, I've been saying for years.

My only problem with the book is the tables--they are not explained that well.

Kate Raphael says

If there were half a star, I would give this 3.5 stars. It's good, it's just not quite what I wanted. I slightly knew Steve Phillips when he was organizing in the Bay Area; he was much younger then and I didn't realize how much of a Democrat he is now. So it was somewhat disappointing to me that he's not really moving outside

of the two-party paradigm. But I love his policy proposals and he does a great job of showing in a data-driven way that's hard to argue with (although I am sure some will try) that these proposals will be popular with a wide swath of the electorate and are capable of mobilizing the "new majority."

There are a lot of people who need to read this book. I may not have been one of them, although I'm glad I did. I think it's great for people to be exposed to Phillips' deep rumination about whether or not to capitalize "White," and his pointing out that 97% of Democratic party money goes to white consultants and what that means about their assumptions. That said, although he gets down in the weeds early on, looking at the exact makeup, demographics and political preferences of the "New Majority" - which is really a group of minorities - when he states that "the new majority is inherently progressive," that hides some pretty deep assumptions that might not pan out.

I think this book should be required reading for every single Democratic party official in every state. But others will find it useful as well, especially if you know people who will argue that the Democrats need to hew to the right in order to court or win back or not lose conservative white swing voters.

Sherry Sharpnack says

The premise of the book is all in the title: "Brown IS the New White." Well written, exhaustively documented, and understandably graphed as the book was, reading the first chapter and the graphs in Appendix A made Mr. Phillips' point-- that people of color and the progressive whites who support humane public policy -- now make up 51% of the electorate.

The rest of the book was simply filler. Me. Phillips also made some good points on how campaign dollars should be spent: on the ground, not in television ads. I gave the book four stars for it being longer than it needed to be -- and for wondering how I fit into campaigning for the next progressive presidential candidate, as I don't fit into a "necessary" demographic as a White, progressive baby-boomer woman.

Shaan says

I read a good chunk of this book during the second Clinton-Trump Presidential debate, so I feel indebted to Phillips for giving me some hope and sanity tonight!

Phillips' basic premise is that the conventional political wisdom that presidential elections are decided by working-class white swing voters is misguided. Instead, he argues, progressive candidates should shift their focus to the so-called New Progressive Majority that includes the growing number of people of color as well as progressive white voters.

Exhibit A: He contrasts the 2004 and 2008 elections Kerry hinged his election on "swing state" working class white voters and fell just short. Contrast this with Obama's base coalition of black, latino and progressive white support - with blue collar white voters helping him to run up the score. Sure, economic conditions, the lack of an incumbent in 2008 and other factors all had a significant impact but Phillips underlying point is valid.

These ideas have been building for some time and it's awesome to see this thinking summarized into a well-reasoned argument supported by numbers and studies.

Phillips takes it a step further by looking at the Obama administration's messaging around health care and economic reforms. He questions whether the losses in the 2010 mid-terms were the result of reverting to a focus on white swing-state voters and not keeping this new coalition engaged. Again, one could argue other factors were equally/more important like mid-term elections traditionally have low voter turnout or point out that odd trend where the party of the incumbent president often suffers losses in the first mid-term election. Still, this is an interesting idea and we should be questioning whether a shift has taken place. Maybe we've finally hit a point where a progressive politician can succeed nationally by presenting a balanced - or even a black-latino centric - messaging instead of the stale swing state narrative. If so, then perhaps we can finally move past divisive and limiting thinking like red-state/blue-state. Wouldn't that be nice?

Lastly, the book takes a look at how these politics affect fundraising and non-profits as well as efforts by the Republican party to win over this New Progressive Coalition.

So, I obviously enjoyed this book. As we head into the 2016 election it will be fascinating to see the turnout and if Hillary can build on this new coalition or if we'll revert back to 2004. Well, fascinating or horrifying.

Scot says

I'm very glad this book was written. That said, I didn't find much in the text that was new or different in terms of information, strategy, etc. The caveat though is that I'm a political activist with years of experience working in political campaigns and community-based organizations active on issues that leverage opportunities for bottom-up racial equity organizing, activism, and policy advocacy.

The one weakness I found in the book is that author's focus on the "smart-ass white boys" who constitute the overwhelming majority of the liberal and conservative political operatives, particularly at the level of elite national politics. I agree that the policy analysts and political campaign consultants he criticizes are extremely problematic. Having worked on political issues inside the Washington, D.C. beltway, I can attest to the overwhelming whiteness, maleness, and absolute arrogance of the class of political operators there who dictate much of what can and can't happen in mainstream politics while making themselves quite well-off financially, thank you.

These white boys control the "consensus" on what's practical and possible, including on issues of race and the participation in politics of people of color, even when, in the overwhelming majority of instances in my experience, they have absolutely no experience working on political issues or as service providers in communities of color. In other words, they have nothing to base their assumptions on, but when challenged will actually cite the "laugh test," a standard by which political efforts, positions, etc., is often judged...by them, btw. Issues that don't meet the standard they exercise huge influence over are laughed at, is the logic, and those who advocate for such efforts are therefore laughable and get marginalized.

But, while I agree that they're a problem, I think the author's analysis invests too much in the smart-ass attitudes of these white boys and not enough in the power dynamics that put them in the position they're in, and that, once in position, they're defending. An economic analysis would help here as power arrangements generally have to do with gaining the position to dictate the distribution of money, which in turn tends to reproduce those power relations.

My point is that the non-governmental institutions of the political class at every level of politics, from local to state to national is, for the most part, controlled by white boys who don't have the cultural competency,

social connections, strategic and tactical expertise to organize communities of color to participate in elections. They're paid for their expertise. They have a financial interest to avoiding being put in a position of having their pre-existing expertise challenged. Moreover, building a base for Democratic politics in communities of color isn't all that profitable. It requires diffusion of financial resources. Concentrating those resources allows consultants to make more money while investing less.

This may be why, as the author noted, a few institutions of influence have made a real investment in promoting people of color into leadership. However, those institutions are not-for-profit charitable organizations. Mission-driven organizations are much more likely to promote diverse leadership and invest strongly in building relationships with low-propensity voters who are disproportionately represented in low-income communities and communities of color who have become alienated from the political process for good reason; political pragmatism as dictated by smart-ass white boys means the issues that are addressed in progressive campaigns are rarely the issues that connect most strongly with the hearts and minds of people in communities of color.

Where I most strongly agree with the author is on this - in order to break the control of smart-ass white boys, we need to figure out how to work through people of color-led organizations rooted organically in communities of color and build a permanent base for progressive politics. This requires us to make ongoing investments in community organizing on issues of direct and specific concern to targeted communities between election years.

We also need to partner with and/or create for-profit enterprises in order to gain access to communications networking technologies, develop apps specifically tailored to communities of color, and form partnerships around shared interests (which is not incompatible with holding a critical view of capitalism, in case we're confused on this point). Finally, my opinionated opinion is that we need to also invest in and partner with direct service providing community institutions, including but not exclusive to food banks, domestic violence shelters, health clinics, adult education and job training programs, GED preparatory programs and alternative schools, and literacy programs. Service providing institutions led by those who are most affected by the concerns they address can do much more than advocacy groups in building long-term relationships with low-income communities, and often serve as community hubs, providing multiple services to communities, including through providing cultural and social opportunities.

All of this, of course, will require us to make philanthropic reform a major initiative of progressives. As a former philanthropic executive, I know there are real limits to what philanthropy can (and should) do. But, here's the rub. Foundations divert money from the public and distribute them according to their preferences. That's our money. We should be trying to shape their preferences.

One last point in my opinionated "review" (call it a diatribe if you like) is this. Immigration is the biggest driver of demographic change. We should acknowledge this and invest in building progressive service organizations that assist with immigrant and refugee resettlement and integration, including through partnering with liberal and progressive faith-based institutions. Time to go to church.

These same prescriptions also apply to the major unions, btw.

Stacy says

There is a lot in this book that Democrats and Progressives could look to in running campaigns in 2016 and beyond. This was written before the 2016 Presidential election. I couldn't help but wonder how it would be different if it were published after the election. I'll be looking to see what the author has written since.

Bookworm says

An informative and important read! A certain presidential candidate claims that Hispanics love him, after he cheerfully insulted a group of them (among others). I couldn't help but think about this particular drama (for lack of a better term since it's an ongoing thing) when reading this book. Is demographics destiny? Could this candidate win the White House despite saying this and other facepalm-worthy (at best...) things?

Steve Phillips takes a look at the changing face of the US voter and why parties (arguably both) in the US aim for the wrong voters instead of galvanizing the ones who have perhaps remained untapped in terms of releasing their potential as an electoral force. He looks at immigration/birth rates, the focus and tenor of campaigns (both electoral and legislative), the structure of political campaigning itself and proposes HOW the Democrats (although really this is something the Republicans should really work on very much) can help harness these voters.

Some of the information was quite redundant for me: I follow elections (although I am certainly no expert!) and a lot of what he was saying wasn't new. However, it was nice to have a book focused about this topic. It was also helpful to read up on certain things like the employment and utilization of people of color in campaigns.

Phillips writes a large majority of political consultants are white. In itself there's nothing wrong with that (although I personally found it maddening since I've found it's been impossible to get a full-time job that is NOT limited by the election cycle in this field), but Phillips makes the case of why it can be helpful to have people of diverse backgrounds to reach the constituents the parties are trying to talk to: he describes a situation where a consultant used the census data to find Arab-American voters. An employee who happened to work for the consultant pulled 10 times more potential voters, because she was aware of how these potential voters identify (they may not have marked themselves as such on the census). Even if she was wrong it was still a MUCH bigger group to tap into.

Or, for example, another case that is playing out in the primaries: the over reliance on TV ads. Aside from the decline of general TV watching, Phillips (in a recent talk at UC Berkeley) noted that not all candidates need to rely on TV ads now for exposure. Social media can take care of that if done well. It's worth noting that certain parties get cuts from TV ads, which perhaps plays into why campaigns rely on them so much.

That said, even though the topic was really interesting I didn't like the writing style of the book. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I found that it was actually really difficult to read even though I was VERY interested in the topic. The only thing that kept me going was the topic in itself. As I wrote, some people won't like this for being too "101-textbook"-ish (telling them what they already know) or for focusing solely on race/ethnicity.

Overall I'd recommend it. And yes, while it's written for the Democrats/left/progressives/ the Republican

Party could stand to read this as well. Their "autopsy" report after the 2012 found that outreach to the same groups Phillips writes about was lacking. It appears no one in their party actually read the autopsy or didn't bother learning from it, so they could probably learn a bit by reading this book. I'd also recommend 'Dog Whistle Politics' by Ian Haney López (which gets a mention in this book) to read as well. It discusses a different topic, but it's a good read about political messaging for anyone.

Borrowed from the library but I think this would be a good purchase for the right person. I also wouldn't be surprised if it pops up in a college class syllabus or as campaign reading.

Krissy says

I would give this 3.5-4 stars. Phillips makes some salient, data-backed points that land like a punch in the gut for us living in the post-2016 election world. The main thesis of the book is sobering: the number of progressive voters in the US is enough to win national elections, but Democrats continue chasing the shrinking White swing voter pool instead of getting out the vote among people of color, to their detriment. "After so many years of focusing on and chasing White swing voters, many cannot conceptualize or comprehend a reality in which White people are not the most important voters to prioritize." Party leaders should sit up and take notice.

Louise says

Steve Phillips brings dose of realism to campaign demographics: the white vote is shrinking –and the white swing vote which both parties have spent millions of dollars courting is shrinking with it. In pursuit of this vote the Democrats are ignoring their best demographic: people of color and white progressives. One chapter on the why of this phenomena is called "Blinded by the White".

He describes in charts and numbers the impressive growth of the "brown" potential voting block. In this group he includes groups from Blacks to Asians, to Native Americans, to Latinos and more. He notes that this group along with white progressives now comprises 51% of the potential electorate and it grows every day as more people in these demographic groups turn 18.

Phillips notes that this group is not interested in what the Democrats have offered the swing voter. They haven't been inspired enough by what they've heard and have sat out the two most recent off year elections, thereby handing decisive victories to the Republicans. He gives the example of Kentucky's Senate candidate Alison Lundergan's refusal to acknowledge that she voted for Barak Obama (although she served as a delegate for him). How many swing votes did this get her? How many voters in the ascendant demographic were turned off and stayed home?

Nate Silver recently wrote of this in a different way. He said that the assumption that Independent voters were politically neither right nor left is challenged by the size of Bernie Sanders vote among those who typically don't vote.

Phillips covers other issues such as the issues that appeal to these voters and the amount of money spent on TV ads when staff for voter registration is more critical.

This is recommended for those interested in politics and elections and highly recommended for Democratic campaign consultants and candidates.

trisha says

Just ordered this on Amazon! Can't wait to see what insight Steve Phillips has.

Nicole says

For those of you who haven't already purchased a copy, please consider doing so **THIS WEEK** (until 2/6/16), to help support Teachers 4 Social Justice (T4SJ), an amazing grassroots teacher org in San Francisco, CA that I am a part of! Every book purchased by 2/6 and using the following link (www.brownisthenewwhite.com/teachers_4...) will help T4SJ receive a \$10 profit. Thank you so much!!
