

By 'Traditional Voters,' the New York Times Means White People - Hillary Clinton and the 2016 Campaign Coverage

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Region: [USA](#)

Global Research, October 19, 2014

[FAIR](#) 16 October 2014

It's still 2014, but the New York Times is already running 2016 campaign coverage. This new article ([10/15/14](#)) is about something pretty fundamental: How white voters feel about a black president.

Under the headline "In South, Clinton Tries to Pull Democrats Back Into the Fold," reporter Amy Chozick chronicles Hillary Clinton's campaigning for a Senate candidate in Kentucky, a state she won during the 2008 Democratic presidential primary. The Times notes that Clinton won thanks to "a huge advantage among white working-class voters." And that's the point of the piece: how someone like Clinton would be more appealing to white voters than Obama.

That's the point, but in the second paragraph Chozick uses an unfortunate euphemism:

White Democrats voted for Mrs. Clinton over Mr. Obama by 49 percentage points in 2008, a telling indication of both her strength and Mr. Obama's trouble in attracting traditional Democratic voters.

So is a "traditional voter" a white voter? Since the whole premise of the piece is about how Clinton would appeal to the white vote, that would seem to be the message. It recalls something that MSNBC host Chris Matthews said about Obama and his failure to connect with "regular Democrats" (Extra!, [7/08](#)). (This was before Obama gave him that "[thrill going up my leg](#)".) Regular, in the context of that race, sure *seemed* to mean one thing: white people.

The Times piece refers to the "the racial and class divisions in the Democratic Party that emerged in 2008 and have been exacerbated during Mr. Obama's presidency," and the papers gives voice to those who say this is Obama's fault:

Many Democrats said Mr. Obama never made efforts to repair the divides that became apparent that year, leaving states like Kentucky and Arkansas vulnerable to a Republican rout.

So Obama is so unappealing to whites that Kentucky is a Republican state now? For a piece that is crafted around the idea that white Democratic votes are really in play, it would have

been helpful to point to some numbers—though it wouldn't have much helped the piece. In [2008](#), exit polls show that Obama lost the white vote in Kentucky to John McCain by 63 to 36 percent. And [four years earlier](#), when the race was between two white guys? John Kerry lost to George W. Bush, 64 to 35 percent.

So maybe the lesson is that white people in Kentucky aren't "traditional Democratic voters" at all.

One of the most jarring passages was this:

Jonathan Miller, a former Kentucky state treasurer, said it was voters' animosity toward Mr. Obama, and not necessarily excitement for Mrs. Clinton, that was energizing Democrats here. "We're just nostalgic for when Democrats were different than Obama," he said.

Back when Democrats were "different" than Obama. Wonder what he means by that. Traditional?

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