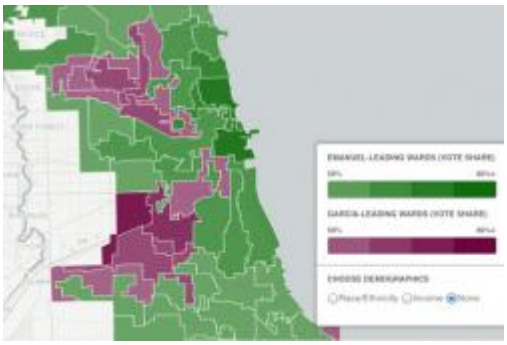
Blame the Black Political Class For Re-Electing Obama's Mayor Rahm Emanuel in Chicago

written by Bruce A. Dixon | April 12, 2015



NOTE: The original version of this article quoted a claim that no voter registration drive was conducted. Since we did not take the time to fact-check this claim before publication, the article has been altered to omit the claim. – Bruce A. Dixon

The results are in, and the truth hurts. Rahm Emanuel will sit in the mayor's office on the fifth floor of Chicago's City Hall four more years. Despite fudging police stats to make murders disappear, despite stonewalling on police torture and atrocities, despite deliberately shortening red light camera intervals to raise revenue for his buddies, despite closing and privatizing more than 50 public schools, almost exclusively in black and brown neighborhoods, than anywhere in the country, and despite his facing a solid progressive Democrat challenger, Rahm Emanuel carried every single ward in black Chicago, not by big margins, but by enough.

It's true that Chuy Garcia was outspent at least six to one in the April runoff and twelve to one in the February election. It's true that Emanuel used that cash to buy an unanswerable deluge of radio and TV commercials. Big money and media are important, but these are advantages the candidates of capital will always possess. Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel had something else in his pocket.

Rahm Emanuel's biggest asset was the overwhelming support of Chicago's well-established black political class of preachers, business types, “community leaders” and public officials. President Barack Obama himself came home to Chicago this year and in 2011 to campaign for Rahm and cut commercials for him. Nearly every prominent black elected official in town, Democrats all, came out for Rahm, for privatization, for gentrification, for austerity, for more of the same. This is the state of black politics in 2015, and the reason that Rahm Emanuel carried every single one of Chicago's majority black wards.

A career Democrat politician himself, Chuy Garcia could talk about the injustice of high stakes testing and privatizing public schools. What Garcia simply could not do was explain to black audiences why almost every black politician in town including the black Chicago Democrat in the White House was riding with Rahm. To do so would have been to directly criticize the regime of black urban politics and the policies of the president himself, something even the most “progressive” career Democrat politicians don't do.

Soon after taking office in 2011, Rahm Emanuel had dinner with Karen Lewis, president of the

Chicago Teachers Union. Rahm told the CTU president that a quarter of Chicago's public school children would never amount to anything and that he refused to “throw money” at it. Lewis promptly took the mayor's remarks public. That's not the kind of thing career Democrats pols do to each other.

Before being diagnosed with brain cancer last fall, Karen Lewis was the presumptive mayoral candidate and actually leading Rahm Emanuel. As a black woman and not a career Democrat, Lewis might have felt freer than Garcia did to question the extent to which urban black politicians, not just in Chicago but in Atlanta, New York, Philly, and a hundred other cities, and the president himself were in bed with gentrifiers, school privatizers, warmongers and pension cutters. Lewis might have pointed out the close personal and political relationships between Illinois Republican governor Bruce Rauner, who aims to make Illinois a right-to-work state one county at a time, and Mayor Emanuel. She might have seized upon the widespread civic outrage in black Chicago against police immunity and impunity in a way that Chuy was not prepared to do.

Unlike Garcia, Karen Lewis was on record saying that Rahm Emanuel's policies of privatizing public education were nothing more or less than carrying out President Obama's national policy on public education. But Lewis wasn't the candidate. Garcia was.

“To win, Chuy needed to carry black wards against Emanuel, to make discouraged voters in those neighborhoods come out,” a campaign staffer told Black Agenda Report.

“You do that by conducting an intense voter registration drive in those areas, and giving those people compelling reasons to come out. It could have been done. Chuy's campaign was dealt a good hand, but they didn't play it. They failed to emphasize the issues that could have set black Chicago on fire.”

“This was the winter and spring when Ferguson was on everybody's lips. Chuy could have won wider and deeper support in black Chicago by focusing early and sustained attention on the corrupt and brutal practices of CPD, Chicago's Police Department. He didn't do that. It took weeks to get the Garcia campaign to endorse the drive for reparations for survivors of Chicago police torture. It took weeks more to briefly draw Garcia's attention to CPD's black site at Homan Square, another controversy he declined to make a big sustained stink about. The campaign pissed away these key opportunities to mobilize black support. And the only jobs program they announced with actual numbers was Chuy's proposal to hire a thousand extra cops.”

There's a nonsense story going around that Chicago's mayoral election was “a fight for the future of liberalism” or “a fight for the soul of the Democratic party.” Both these are pretty much nonsense. Mayor Emanuel and President Obama along with the their supporting constellation of black elected officials, preachers, business types and community leaders are almost all liberals and Democrats. Emanuel's closing of 50 plus public schools, and his drive to privatize education is the national policy of a liberal Democrat president, implemented by liberal Democrat mayors and black elected officials in Philly, Sacramento, Atlanta and hundreds of US cities.

Sure, big money and big media were important, as were strategic blunders by the Garcia campaign, like not seizing upon issues that could have won them energetic, fired up followers. But the biggest single factor in Rahm Emanuel's win this week was the overwhelming support of the black political class from the president on down.

Rahm Emanuel is Obama's mayor. This is President Obama's victory, and his legacy to Chicago. It's Bobby Rush's victory and Emanuel's atrocities are on his tab as well. It's the victory of the black misleadership class over the people they ostensibly represent, and we'll all be paying for it in the

days and the years to come.

There's the usual lot of talk about this being the beginning of a long term mobilization, of a permanent movement. We'll see. If the mobilizing energies are poured back into more Democrat candidates, who by habit, nature, and professional courtesy don't disagree too strenuously with other Democrats, it's hard to imagine any different result.

Here's a link to the *New York Times* exit polling on the election, and to the ward by ward totals posted at the Chicago Board of Elections.

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