

1-5-2007

Will Another White Male Be Elected President in 2008?

David E. Drew
Claremont Graduate University

Hedley Burrell

Recommended Citation

This article first appeared in Drew, D.E. and Burrell, H. (2007, January 5). Will Another White Male Be Elected President in 2008. *Christian Science Monitor*, p. 9. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0105/p09s01-coop.html>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the CGU Faculty Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in CGU Faculty Publications and Research by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

Will another white male be elected president in 2008?

By David E. Drew, Hedley Burrell / January 5, 2007 at 12:01 pm EST

CLAREMONT, CALIF.; AND SARASOTA, FLA.

Barack Obama. Hillary Rodham Clinton. Bill Richardson. The field of minority and female candidates for president has never been so strong. But the question remains: Despite the expected presence of an African-American, a woman, and a Latino, will America in 2008 elect yet another male president of northern European descent?

No one can say for certain, but we hope this streak ends soon, because it's important that America elect its leaders from the full breadth of talent available in its diverse population.

The indicators of change are encouraging. A 2005 poll by Siena Research Institute/Hearst Newspapers showed that 81 percent of respondents would vote for a female candidate. And a CBS News/New York Times poll from early last year found that nearly all Americans say they would vote for a woman for president from their own political party if she were qualified.

Had former Secretary of State Colin Powell run for president in 1996, he might have won. That's what both Hugh Price, then president of the National Urban League, and Robert Woodson Sr., president of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, said in a PBS "African American World" program.

"The opportunities for female and minority candidates have increased," says political scientist Thomas Carsey of Florida State University. "Barriers are breaking down at a broad level in society, and this is happening in politics as well."

Today, female and minority candidates, he notes, are more likely to win state-level elections and succeed in the private sector – achievements that can be among the steppingstones to the presidency. They also have improved access to the nominating process, which is more open, Carsey adds.

"I don't think it's a stretch at all to imagine that we might have a female president or a person of color as president," adds Calvin Exoo, professor of government at St. Lawrence University.

Both Democratic and Republican pollsters have expressed similar sentiments.

Nonetheless, the simple fact remains that, from its inception, the American presidency has been an exclusive club. In addition to being males of northern European origin, all but two presidents were Protestants (John Kennedy was a Catholic and Richard Nixon was a Quaker) and all but one (James Buchanan) were married. Only Ronald Reagan was divorced.

And consider this. Since 1952, there's been only one presidential election year in which the name Nixon, Dole, or Bush was not on the GOP ticket. (The exception is 1964, when Barry Goldwater and William Miller were trounced.) In fact, no Republican has been elected to the White House without either the name Nixon or Bush on the ticket since Herbert Hoover was elected in 1928! And should Senator Clinton win in 2008 and serve two terms, either a Bush or a Clinton will have been president for 28 consecutive years.

It is also worth noting that 10 of the 42 presidents – we call George W. Bush No. 43 because Grover Cleveland served two nonconsecutive terms and is counted twice – had the same last name as another president. In fact, eight came from the same family as another president. There were two father/son combinations – John and John Quincy Adams and George H.W. and George W. Bush. Benjamin Harrison was the grandchild of William Henry Harrison, and Franklin Roosevelt was a fifth cousin of Theodore Roosevelt. Andrew Johnson and Lyndon Johnson were not related.

In addition to their gender, racial, ethnic, and religious homogeneity, presidents have come from only a few states. They shifted from the East to the South and West as Americans migrated. But for more than 40 years, with the exception of Gerald Ford, all the occupants of the White House have come from Southern or Western states. (The Nebraska-born Ford grew up in Michigan.)

More than half the presidents (23 out of 42) were born in one of four states: Virginia (eight), Ohio (seven), Massachusetts (four) and New York (four).

Is America ready to change these patterns? We're confident that it is, and that either a woman or a minority candidate will be elected to the presidency in a matter of years, not decades. It is certainly a distinct possibility for 2008.

Presidential trivia

1. If elected president, would Arizona Republican John McCain be the first former prisoner of war to serve in the White House?
2. Two engineers have served as president. Who were they?
3. Which Founder president had red hair?
4. Which three presidents were shot in the chest and survived (one before he was

president, one when he was president, one after he was president)?

5. Which president wrote his memoirs in a desperate attempt to pay his debts?
6. Which president was so nearsighted that he traveled with 12 pairs of glasses in case of loss?
7. How many occupants of the White House have been college or university presidents and who were they?
8. Who was the last president to lack a college degree?
9. Can you name the president who was a former professional model?
10. Which two presidents coached college football?

Answers:

1. No. The British captured Jackson during the Revolutionary War.
2. Hoover, Carter
3. Jefferson
4. Jackson (before), Reagan (while president), Theodore Roosevelt (after).
5. Grant
6. Theodore Roosevelt
7. Three: Wilson (Princeton), Eisenhower (Columbia), and Garfield (Hiram College)
8. Truman
9. Ford
10. Ford (Yale) and Wilson (Wesleyan)

• David Drew, a sociologist, holds the Platt chair in education and management at Claremont Graduate University. Hedley Burrell is a former Washington Post editor and writer, and was a media adviser to US government agencies.

© The Christian Science Monitor. All Rights Reserved. Terms under which this service is provided to you. Privacy Policy.