

Voice of youth grows louder in 2008 election

By Brooke Monet

During every presidential election, older voters question the younger generation about whether they know the issues.

The best way to truly know what is going on in the minds of young voters is to simply ask.

Some fall into the stereotype of those who aren't plugged into the election.

"I would not register, even if I was old enough to vote, because I am not interested and do not know any of the issues," said Ryan Crandall, 16.

But others do care.

Latrice Casson, 16, said she knew a lot about the issues that were being debated in the election and felt it was important to know what they were because they will affect her life. She also believed Democrat Barack Obama would be the better candidate of the two because of his health care plan.

Kyle Hinrichs, 17, disagreed with Casson and would have voted for Republican John McCain because of the candidate's conservative platform and bailout plan.

The political opinions



People gather to watch as election results come in at the Chase Park Plaza on Nov. 4. Kamilah Williams photo

of all young Americans are important, but those of voting-age teens held even more weight in 2008 because that group had the ability to change the outcome of the election.

Jacob Aubchon, 18, is a proud registered voter and stands strongly behind his belief.

"I am voting for Obama be-

cause his bailout plan is better and the economy is important for me."

An estimated 23 million young Americans under the age of 30 voted in the 2008 presidential election — an increase of 3.4 million voters over the 2004 election.

These voters favored Obama over McCain by double-digit figures, 66 per-

cent to 32 percent, according to figures studied by Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.

Now that the votes are in and Obama has been elected president, it can be said that the voice of the younger generation really does count.

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ELECTION OF BARACK OBAMA AS U.S. PRESIDENT

Why Not “Because he’s Black?”

By Khemal Johnson

Why do people vote? There are many motivations: change, better opportunities, more access, economic stability, a right as citizens of this country. The list goes on. But in an election of such historic proportions, did some vote simply based on skin color? Absolutely. But was there anything wrong with that?

This election was so important for so many reasons, only one being that President-elect Barack Obama will become the first black president.



Still, as a country, we know how much of an issue skin color was. But some still think it is not right to vote for Obama based on race. I see nothing wrong with it.

Race means so much in America. When I asked my mother about voting based on Obama’s race, she said, “It shows that African American people have a sense of pride.”

The proof that it’s a relevant issue was obvious a few weeks before the election at Goody Goody, a restaurant on Natural Bridge and Goodfellow. Many discussed the topic over lunch.

“Over the years that we’ve been through, it’s a blessing and it’s time for a change political and historically,” said Dwight Nash Sr., an older, black St. Louisan.

Some whites could understand why African Americans would vote based on race, too. Though not all condoned it.

“I understand it, and it’s fine,” said Daniel Riff, another Goody Goody customer. “I’m Jewish, but I wouldn’t necessarily vote for someone just because they’re Jewish.”

“It’s a hard question,” added

Michele Pusateri. “I think it’s a very historic event. Still I hope people vote for credentials, but I understand it. He’s doing a dang good job.”

People should understand it. Blacks deserved this, quite frankly. In 1619, the first African Americans were brought to America through enslavement. Since then, we have dealt with everything from slavery to Jim Crow laws, and now there is an opportunity to vote for an African American male. And you mean to tell me I shouldn’t vote for Barack Obama just because he’s black?

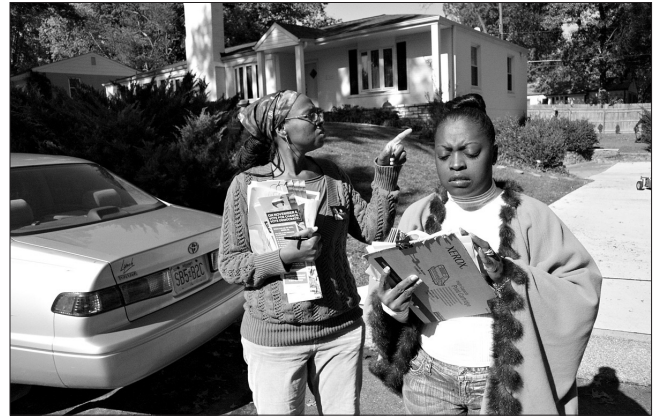
Of course I considered Obama’s qualifications. As many people said that day at Goody Goody, you really must.

“Probably about 75 to 80 percent of blacks are voting based on color. I don’t think they should vote because he’s black; they should vote because of what he stands for,” added Nathaniel Griffin.

But besides qualifications, there’s so much that Obama stands for. Really, voting based on someone’s skin color should never be the sole reason for casting any vote. But to look at it another way, the opposite effect has hurt many candidates in the past, as Daniel Riff pointed out. And there was probably some effect this year, too.

It’s hard to say what’s right, but a vote for Obama was a vote for what he stands for — the struggle and pride of being black in America.

As Jahkeem Johnson stated, “It lets me know that black people are ready to stand for one another. There’s a lot of talk about how black people don’t stand for each other and this is an example to show this. Other races do it and they should, just as we should.”



Campaign workers canvas in Richmond Heights. Saddyiah Rice photo

Young voters

do their homework before hitting polls

By Opal Owens and Jaymi Wheeler

Young voters made a difference in the presidential election. Contrary to what some believe, many said they went to the polls knowing the issues.

“We need change,” said Tyrone Martin, 23. “I’m tired of struggling, and I’m tired of seeing our country and government struggle.”

Voters age 18 to 29 made a huge difference in Missouri, with 18 percent of young voters making it to the polls. That was up from 7 percent in the 2004 presidential election.

Feranda Smith, 19, said many decisions are still being made on race, religion or gender.

“A lot of people just want (Obama to win) so we can have the first black president,” Smith said.

However, several voters discussed different issues that motivated young people to vote, like the economy, war and medical crisis.

As Quinton Jackson, 21, said, “Tax cuts are my main drive for voting.”

As a member of the military, Alicia Allen, 21, said the war was an important issue to her. She said she would vote for Obama because she doesn’t want to get sent to Iraq.

Another issue on voters’ minds is the economy, said Jiles Coleman, 22.

“It’s going downhill,” Coleman said. “We have problems in this country, and the only way to solve them is voting.”

Of course, there were some people who felt voting still doesn’t matter.

“It doesn’t matter if we vote or not because the electoral college is going to decide for us, so why should I waste my time,” said Rebecca Jones, 22.

On the other hand, Dara Strickland, 25, said she felt it is very important to vote because, “if we don’t vote, then we don’t have the right to complain.”

“It’s going downhill. We have problems in this country, and the only way to solve them is voting.” — Jiles Coleman, 22

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Democratic supporters mingle before election results come in at the Chase Park Plaza on Nov. 4. Kamilah Williams photo

Popular music haunt uses audience to draw voters

By Aurora Miller

Vintage Vinyl contributed to voter registration in this year's election, using the influence of music.

The store became part of a larger trend by registering people, as registrations shot through the roof this election season.

From 2007 to 2008, and aggressively in the spring of 2008, Vintage Vinyl reached out to voters through registration drives, partnering with local radio station 100.3 The Beat.

"Vintage Vinyl has a long history with urban radio in St. Louis," said part-owner Tom "Papa" Ray. "We connected The Beat to let them know they were welcome to promote and co-sponsor voter

registration efforts for their audience."

He said this centered on a week this summer when The Beat made a public service announcement regarding voter registration tables set up at the store's Delmar location in The Loop.

The radio station also sent out a team from the station to help promote the event. Ray saw those efforts and the state of Missouri's efforts as beneficial.

"Here we are today. We saw a lot of people being involved. There was a quarter of a million new voters in Missouri," said Ray.

According to Laura Egerdal, communications director for Missouri's Secretary of State, the state added 342,000 new

first-time voters to its rolls this election.

Vintage Vinyl customers Melissa Roberts and Rendall Thomas, both 23, of St. Louis, had no problem with the business' registration and campaigning efforts during this election season. Roberts saw it as a convenience, because she registered there.

Sue Wagener, 49, of Chicago, said, "I think, in this election, marketing is getting in the way of the issues. Opinions don't sway me one way or another."

Ray declined to say who he was endorsing but said he does not think it will have an effect on his business.

An employee said the store had sold some merchandise that promoted Democrat Barack Obama.

Some customers didn't say "Nay" to the store endorsing a specific candidate.

"I don't have a problem with it if a business owner wants to put up a campaign sign — that's their business," Allison, 28, of St. Louis, said.

Another customer, Joe, 25, of St. Louis, said that, because of the store's longevity, its business won't be affected.

"Do I think it will affect business? No, Vintage Vinyl has been here for a long time."

Roberts and Thomas didn't see Vintage Vinyl's getting involved as a problem.

"They're a private business; they can do what they want," said Thomas.

Roberts said, "If you believe in something, you've got to speak up."

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Church, family take backseat

in political influence during the 2008 election, young voters say

By K.C. Richerson

Some people claim that parental and religious influence have no weight in their views on the election. It is global issues that cause them to vote a certain way.

At least, that's what Katis Balis said prior to the 2008 election.

"I'm not really a religious person, so religion doesn't play any role in who I have voted for at all," said Balis, a senior at Ladue High School.

"I believe that there are more important issues," she added. "I am for gay rights and marriages and getting out of Iraq, which is really important to me."

Many St. Louisans between the ages of 18 and 25 are similar to Balis, saying their views are solely based upon issues.

But the opinions many of them express don't seem to come out of the blue. They are often based upon personal experiences that often do involve their family and friends in some way.

For example, Chris Plender, 22, a Truman College graduate student, said his family rarely shares the same political views. His mother was a fan of Sen. Hillary Clinton. His father was for Sen. Barack Obama. So, to make his decision, he turned to cable news sources.

"... The guests on the news affect what people think; they help you analyze the overall situation and bring a somewhat neutral view from both parties."

Plender said he no longer looks to religion, either.

"When I was younger, I was force fed the whole Catholicism bit ... it kind of tired me out on the whole religion thing," he said.

Another voter, Darrell



People go door to door in Richmond Heights and leave Barack Obama literature at homes when no one responds. Sadiyah Rice photo



A campaign volunteer prepares to go canvassing in Tower Grove. Jerrica Williams photo

Huntspon, 25, said his vote was heavily influenced by the economy, his everyday life and his current employment situation. Huntspon spoke about the election while applying for a job at the clothing store Aero-

postale at the St. Louis Galleria mall. His hours as a manager at the mall's Mrs. Fields Cookie Store were recently cut in half, to part-time status.

Huntspon said that political conversation with his mother

and his church congregation have almost no weight in his vote compared to his personal situation.

It seems voters like Huntspon are more likely to influence others. But there are others whose opinions are colored by their family situation, such as Lamont Evans, 18.

Evans' mother has been hospitalized for about two weeks. Medical bills have affected his views on health care and the way he will vote. While watching the election results from his mother's hospital room, Evans said he saw a weight had been lifted from her.

"My mother cried during (Obama's) acceptance speech because she knew that she would soon have a way to pay for her bills and not have to strain herself to go back to work."

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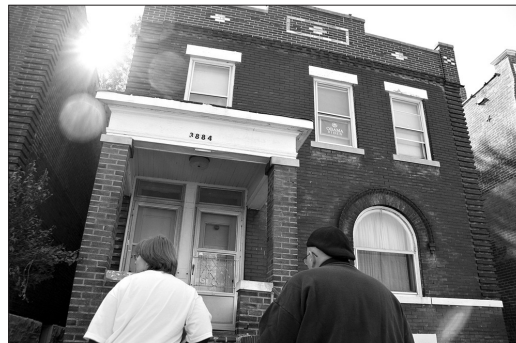
Barack Obama delivers a speech at the St. Louis Arch to a record-breaking crowd on Oct. 18. Shalonda Farrow photo

Nonstop stumping

There's no rest from the campaign trail as the race heats up in the final weeks



A supporter of Barack Obama canvasses a neighborhood in south St. Louis. Jerrica Williams photo



Every house in Tower Grove is a potential vote for campaign workers.

Ralph Tyler photo



A worker has a light moment during a day of canvassing in Tower Grove.

Ralph Tyler photo

ELECTION OF BARACK OBAMA AS U.S. PRESIDENT



Barack Obama mingles with the crowd Oct. 18 after speaking at the St. Louis Arch to a record-breaking crowd. Shalonda Farrow photo

Celeb affect unclear in voter turnout

By Alisiana Peters

Celebrity spokespeople everywhere were the face of this year's political campaign. But did celebrities really have an influence on today's young voters?

TV talk show host Ellen DeGeneres, rapper Daddy Yankee and the cast of "High School Musical 3" were all involved in political organizations that helped encourage young people to vote on Election Day.

USA Today reported 57 percent of people ages 18 to 29 said they were registered to vote — a 5 percent increase from the past 12 years. Could celebrities have had an influence on this increase? In some ways celebrities did influence young voters, but in some ways they did not.

Chris Martin, a 25-year old student at St. Louis University, did not think celebrities talked about what or who influenced them before the election.

"I think they're definitely having an impact encouraging people," he said. "But I don't think they're making their decisions for them."

Andrea Sepulveda, 18, disagreed, saying, "I think certain celebrities are a positive

change for us, but it all depends on how people use celebrities."

Jeremy Orbe, 18, also disagreed, believing celebrities' endorsements do have a major impact on him and other young people.

"Tina Fey with the whole Sarah Palin thing was good," he said.

A lot has been done to make sure young Americans were represented in this year's election.

The Rock the Vote campaign recruited celebrities to convince young people to register to vote and get involved in the political process. They did endorsements and filmed commercials to catch young voters' attention to get them going in this election.

Rapper Kanye West filmed a documentary about young voters for MTV's Choose or Lose campaign.

Dave Matthews and actress America Ferrera are among dozens of other examples of the celebrities who pitched in. But with all the commercials, songs and other endorsements, did young voters really think they were influenced by celebrities?

It's hard to tell. But Kristen Peters, 19, didn't think so.

"No, I believe I can make a good decision without the help of celebrities," she said. "They don't really matter in my opinion."

Chris Martin agreed, taking it a step further.

"If celebrities are getting involved because they want to, then that's great, but I wonder if they're just doing it because it's a trend."

Director's note

This year's Minority Journalism Workshop faced many challenges as a result of tough economic times. The students and volun-

teers who put the program together have many to thank in helping make this, the 31st year of the workshop, a success. A special thanks goes to:



- Sandra Osburn and the staff at St. Louis Community College at Forest Park
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- Ferguson-Florissant School District
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- St. Louis Post-Dispatch
- Ashley Mitchell, Brian Brooks and the Gaines Oldham Black Cultural Center at the University of Missouri
- Best Transportation of St. Louis
- Onesto Pizzeria & Trattoria

With a program of this strength, this list could go long. I'll beg apologies of anyone who donated time or services not mentioned — any omission is a reflection of a job done on deadline, not of our appreciation for your generosity.

Finally, I want to thank all the volunteers who lent time to teach our students, the students who dedicated themselves to completing a challenging program and, last but not least, the families of both the volunteers and students who supported them.

Though this word can't encapsulate just how much I appreciate all of your contributions — thanks.

— CHRISTOPHER BOYCE