



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on November 16, 2012

Obama's Secret Weapon: The Illiterate Vote

During the last election campaign there was much talk about the Latino Vote, the African-American Vote, the Asian Vote, the Soccer-Mom Vote, the Jewish Vote, but no talk about the one vote that tipped the scales of this presidential campaign in favor of Obama: the Illiterate Vote.

Who and what is the Illiterate Vote? They are part of the 60 million illiterates in the United States that Arthur Sulzberger, publisher of the *New York Times*, referred to in 1988 when he told a group of newspaper publishers, "Today up to 60 million Americans — one third of the adult population — cannot read their local newspaper. As we edge closer to the 21st century, life is becoming more complex and will become more difficult for adults who cannot read."



And according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, things haven't improved much since 1988:

In 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) sponsored a comprehensive reading assessment of American adult literacy skills. Nineteen thousand adults were interviewed and given a reading assessment in all fifty states and the District of Columbia in both homes and in prisons.

After completion, this massive assessment revealed that only thirteen percent of American adults are proficiently literate, most of whom hold a college degree, while the majority merely have intermediate literacy skills. However, the population of adults with basic or below basic skills total forty-three percent according to NAAL research, which is far higher than those with proficient skills.

In other words, we are talking about a huge illiterate or semi-literate underclass in the United States, created by our public schools, most of whom live in our urban areas. How is it that so many children in our elementary schools never learn to read? A scandalous situation, considering how much is spent on public education. The result is that when these children become adults, they generally have little interest in politics and don't vote.

But in 2008, Barack Obama, a trained community organizer, was able to make good use of this illiterate cohort. He had organized these Alinsky "have-nots" in Chicago and made them into a political force to confront the "haves." It is not just a coincidence that the Chicago public schools have been able to provide the Alinsky radicals with plenty of illiterates to join the ranks of the "have nots." In fact, Chicago schools specialize in turning out illiterates, as Marva Collins can attest. Ms. Collins was a teacher in those schools for 14 years and quit in disgust when she realized that she was not permitted to teach her students to read in the way that would insure their success. She created her own private school, Westside Preparatory, where all of her students flourished. Even Jesse Jackson sent his



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daughter to Ms. Collins's school. But why didn't he protest at what the public schools were doing to the children in their charge, turning so many African-American children into illiterates?

What Obama knew is that these illiterates, properly organized, could make the difference in elections since virtually all of them were citizens and eligible to vote. He understood the potential power of the powerless. Which meant that his experience as a community organizer could serve him well in national politics.

But how do you get these underclass illiterates to the polls? By bribing them with "gifts." Indeed, the "cell-phone lady" on YouTube who went viral is representative of that constituency. She said that everyone in Cleveland on Social Security with no income was eligible for a free Obama cell-phone. That video was seen by over six million viewers.

Mitt Romney got the story only partially right when he told a group of donors on a 20-minute conference call how Obama won the election by offering gifts. The *New York Times* of 11/15/12 reported:

Mitt Romney ... attributed his defeat in part to what he called big policy "gifts" that the president had bestowed on loyal Democratic constituencies, including young voters, African-Americans and Hispanics.... "In each case, they were very generous in what they gave to these groups," Mr. Romney said.... "With regards to the young people, for instance, a forgiveness of college loan interest was a big gift. Free contraceptives were very big with young, college-aged women. And then, finally, Obamacare also made a difference for them, because as you know, anybody now 26 years of age and younger was now going to be part of their parents' plan, and that was a very big gift to young people."

Despite all of these gifts to regular Democratic constituencies, Romney got 48 percent of the vote. Almost half the voters were not interested in these gifts which were available to all Americans. But the one group that received gifts of a different kind were not in Romney's sights, because that group is not considered politically important. But for the community-organizer-in chief the Illiterate Vote was needed to put him over the top.

Of course, it is unlikely that the Democrats will always have a candidate for the presidency who is both charismatic and a professional community organizer, but Republicans had better be prepared to deal with the Illiterate Vote. What Republicans must do is launch a campaign to prevent the public schools from producing millions of more illiterates who then can be used by the Democrats.

The GOP should provide parents of children at risk in the public schools with an effective, easy-to-use reading program that they can use at home to turn their children into literate American citizens. Fortunately, such a reading program does actually exist. It is this author's inexpensive *Alpha-Phonics* reading program. It has been used by thousands of homeschoolers for more than twenty years and should be given to minority parents desperate to make sure their children will be taught to read.

Such a program on the part of the GOP would be greatly appreciated by minority parents who need this kind of priceless gift that will have a lifelong positive impact on the life of their family. If you had seen the film, *Waiting for Superman*, you couldn't help but be deeply moved by those desperate parents whose children didn't win the lottery for a place in one of the private and charter schools. Those parents knew that their children would be relegated to some failing public school where they would never learn to read. What a difference the GOP could make in the lives of these families by giving them the gift of literacy. This would also give Republicans the opportunity to meet directly with these parents



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who will be voting in the next presidential race.



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