



Written by [Dennis Behreandt](#) on September 24, 2010

The Politics of Resentment

Mayor Adrian Fenty, under whom the murder rate has gone down and the school children's test scores have gone up, was resoundingly defeated for re-election.

Nor was Mayor Fenty simply a passive beneficiary of the rising test scores and falling murder rates. He appointed Michelle Rhee as head of the school system and backed her as she fought the teachers' union and fired large numbers of ineffective teachers — something considered impossible in most cities across the country.

Mayor Fenty also appointed the city's chief of police, Cathy Lanier, who has cracked down on hoodlumism, as well as crime.

Either one of these achievements would make mayors local heroes in most other cities. Why then was he clobbered in the election?

One key fact tells much of the story: Mayor Fenty received more than 70 percent of the white vote in Washington. His opponent received more than 80 percent of the black vote.

Both men are black. But the head of the school system that he appointed is Asian and the chief of police is a white woman. More than that, most of the teachers who were fired were black. There were also bitter complaints that black contractors did not get as many of the contracts for doing business with the city as they expected.

In short, the mayor appointed the best people he could find, instead of running a racial patronage system, as a black mayor of a city with a black majority is apparently expected to. He also didn't spend as much time schmoozing with the folks as was expected.

So what if he gave their children a better education and gave everybody a lower likelihood of being murdered?

The mayor's faults were political faults. He did his job, produced results and thought that this should be enough to get him re-elected. He refused to do polls and focus groups, and he ignored what his political advisers were warning him about.

No doubt Mayor Fenty is now a sadder and wiser man politically. While that may help him if he wants to pursue a political career, Adrian Fenty's career is not nearly as important as what his story tells us about the racial atmosphere in this country.

How did we reach the point where a city is so polarized that an overwhelming majority of the white vote goes to one candidate and the overwhelming majority of the black vote goes to the opposing candidate?

How did we reach the point where black voters put racial patronage and racial symbolism above the education of their children and the safety of everyone?

There are many reasons but the trend is ominous. One key factor was the creation, back in the 1960s, of





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a whole government-supported industry of race hustling.

President Lyndon Johnson's "war on poverty" — a war that we have lost, by the way — bankrolled all kinds of local "leaders" and organizations with the taxpayers' money, in the name of community "participation" in shaping the policies of government.

These "leaders" and community activists have had every reason to hype racial resentments and to make issues "us" against "them."

One of the largely untold stories of our time has been the story of how ACORN, Jesse Jackson and other community activists have been able to transfer billions of dollars from banks to their own organizations' causes, with the aid of the federal government, exemplified by the Community Reinvestment Act and its sequels.

Racial anger and racial resentments are the fuel that keeps this lucrative racket going. How surprised should anyone be that community activist groups have used mau-mau disruptions in banks and harassed both business and government officials in their homes?

Lyndon Johnson once said that it is not hard to do the right thing. What is hard is knowing what is right. We can give him credit for good intentions, so long as we remember what road is paved with good intentions.

Thomas Sowell graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University (1958) and went on to receive his master's in economics from Columbia University (1959) and a doctorate in economics from the University of Chicago (1968). He is the author of 28 books including his most recent, *Intellectuals and Society*. Currently he is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. His Web site is www.tsowell.com.

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