

POP & POLITICS WITH FARAI CHIDEYA  
THIRD MIDTERM ELECTIONS SPECIAL: THE GREENE SPACE  
"THE NEW MAP: AMERICA, REDRAWN AND RECONCEIVED"  
NOVEMBER 3, 2010

Farai Chideya, host:

MELISSA HARRIS-PERRY: IT IS THE BEST AND WORST TIMES,  
SIMULTANEOUSLY.

TODD ZWILLICH: THE INGREDIENTS ARE IN THE CAPITAL FOR ALMOST  
ABSOLUTE GRIDLOCK.

Farai Chideya: A divided Congress. An impatient electorate. We've brought together  
people who've taken a hard look at the future of race and politics.

ERICA WILLIAMS: WE ARE NOT YET POST-RACIAL, DON'T KNOW IF I WANT TO  
BE POST-RACIAL.

JOHN RIDLEY: I BELIEVE THAT AMERICAN IS A FORWARD NATION, IT'S A  
PROGRESSIVE NATION.

ROSIE PEREZ: I DON'T THINK WE'RE MOVING FAST ENOUGH IN REGARDS TO  
CHANGE.

Chideya: We put them together with a live audience.

STANLEY: WHAT ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE? DO THEY HAVE ANY FUTURE? AND IF  
YOU THINK THEY DO, WHAT DO YOU THINK THE GOVERNMENT CAN DO?

CHAP: SO MANY FOLKS HAVE NOT EVEN GOTTEN A PIECE OF THE PIE, HAVEN'T  
EVEN BEEN GIVEN A FORK OR A SPOON TO ENJOY THAT PIE AT ALL.

Chideya: Join me, Farai Chideya, for Pop & Politics, a production of WNYC and  
American Public Media. First, the news.

\*\*\*\*\*

SEGMENT A

\*\*\*\*\*

Chideya: I'm Farai Chideya and this is Pop & Politics. Welcome to our third midterm  
elections special. We are live the day after the midterm elections here at The Greene  
Space at WNYC.

[applause]

Chideya: For our first two specials, we traveled to Florida and Arizona, where we met

Tea Party members, people who were dealing with foreclosures, unemployment and homelessness, plus activists and successful businesspeople. And what we found was a lot of anxiety and anger about where America is heading. Here are some of the voices.

KILLROY: A LOT OF PEOPLE OUT OF WORK WITH THIS HOPEY-CHANGEY ECONOMY. WE'VE BEEN HOPED AND CHANGED INTO BANKRUPTCY AND INTO A NEAR-DEPRESSION.

TERESA: THEY'RE LOSING THEY'RE HOMES, THEY'VE LOST THEIR JOBS. AND IT'S SCARY, CAUSE THEY SAY, OH, THE RECESSION'S OVER WITH? NO IT'S NOT.

BEVERLY BRADLEY: THERE IS RACISM, THERE'S ALWAYS GONNA BE RACISM.

ABIDAH ALI: CAUSE WE'RE STILL VIEWED AS, OH, YOU'RE MUSLIM, YOU'RE EITHER A TERRORIST, YOU'RE AN OPPRESSED WOMAN, YOU DON'T HAVE RIGHTS. BECAUSE THEY JUST ASSOCIATE EVERYBODY WITH THAT MINORITY.

JANET WILSON: THEY'RE COMING FROM THE MIDDLE EAST, THEY'RE COMING FROM ALL OVER, AND SOMEBODY HAD BETTER WAKE UP PRETTY SOON BECAUSE IT'S NOT GONNA GET BETTER UNTIL THEY DO.

DAMON: THEY'RE BLAMING EVERY KIND OF BROWN PERSON POSSIBLE FOR THEIR ECONOMIC TURBULENT TIMES.

RUBY MILLIGAN: THE AMERICAN DREAM HAS BECOME A NIGHTMARE.

AL GARZA: WHOSE AMERICAN DREAM IS IT ANYMORE?

ROBERT: WE ARE FAILING, YOU KNOW, AS A NATION, AND IT'S JUST WRONG.

Chideya: We want to talk about what happened in the midterms and what happens next. We're gonna start with Todd Zwillich, who is the Washington correspondent for The Takeaway, a morning show from WNYC and PRI. Todd, what were the surprises?

Todd Zwillich: There were a couple of surprises of individual races, one example, despite the polls I would have thought that Russ Feingold might have hung on to his independent streak in Wisconsin, I might have thought even though he was an incumbent, his independent streak who have allowed him to finally hang on with support from Barack Obama. I would have thought that the president's last-minute hard push for Joe Sestak in Pennsylvania in Philadelphia trying to get out core voters, African American voters in Philadelphia, might have saved Joe Sestak with a Get Out the Vote. It didn't. There's a lot about the trough of the president's political power right now.

Chideya: Speaking of trough, what about John Boehner, who is probably going to be the new Speaker of the House. Is he going to play nice with President Obama?

Zwillich: He may want to. He made conciliatory remarks last night, "It's time to roll up the sleeves," that means cooperation. Every leader who wins says that, because part of the message the voters wanted to send, apart from anger and anxiety that you heard, is we want things to get done. Boehner knows it. The president knows it. The question is, Will

the core bases let them do it? Will John Boehner's base, his conservatives, allow him to reach across to the president? They might not.

Chideya: Perfect time to bring in our other guest, we've got Melissa Harris-Perry, who's a professor of politics and African-American studies at Princeton, and a contributor to The Nation and MSNBC, also Reihan Salam of The National Review. Welcome to you both. And Reihan, what about that question—does John Boehner want to play nice and do the Republicans in general have a stake in collaborating with the Democrats and with the president.

Reihan Salam: That's a good question, I mean I don't know what's going on inside of John Boehner's head, but my sense from his public statements, and not just last night but for the last several weeks, is that he's very interested in proceeding deliberately. He senses that both if you look at the early phase of the so-called Gingrich revolution and if you look at Nancy Pelosi's leadership in the house, there was a kind of very aggressive bid to move very quickly, to pass lots of large sweeping pieces of legislation. The Contract with America pledged to pass large pieces of legislation within the first hundred days of that Congress, and John Boehner has been very explicit and very clear that this is not his intention. Rather, he is intending to, so he says, restore some of the traditional authority and deference that was given to committee chairmen. So having been in the House for a pretty long time, John Boehner seems interested in certain structural, procedural reforms that are designed to create a more deliberative consensual body in the House. Whether or not that is a realistic prospect is an open question. But I certainly thinks that suggests he's interested in moving in a different direction.

Chideya: I want to be sure and talk about people here, because although we did speak with politicians, including two men who both lost the Senate race in Florida, Governor Crist and Congressman Kendrick Meek, we really spent so much of our time talking to people about what was on their hearts and minds. And as you can tell from that montage of voices, there was a lot of disappointment and anger. Melissa, what about turnout? Where there groups that turned out in higher or lower numbers than we expected? And how to parse kind of the feeling of the voters?

Melissa Harris-Perry: What we seem to know so far, and I always want to be careful about this the very next morning, but it looks like the group of senior voters—voters over 65—turned out in much higher rates in 2010 than they did in 2008. And that it looks like the number of youth voters that showed up is pretty flat, which given that we had more senior voters is going to reduce the percentage of youth voters. But it was actually not horrible. African-American voters it looks like turned out in their historic norms, rather than their 2008 unusual turnout. Look, I have a really hard time feeling like something horrible has happened. I know that's what Democrats are supposed to do the next morning, we're supposed to sort of wring our hands and weep and fall prostrate and talk about a tsunami. But the fact is that, what happened in 2006 is Democrats, many of them Blue Dog, many of them quite conservative, won a number of seats that were for the most part in Republican or very sort of purple districts. What we saw last night was more than anything a repudiation of those Blue Dogs and conservatives, a replacement of those conservative Democrats with conservative Republican members. What that says to me is that there's no enormous ideological shift that goes on in the house. Part of what happened is that media has told us there are these crazy people who now are holding office, and I think that's unfair not only to those individuals that we've labeled in

those ways, and also way too fair to Democrats who have plenty of their own crazies. So when I look at these results, I see certainly a tough road ahead, but not one that is so overwhelmingly different than the house that we were facing just two days ago.

Chideya: There's always a question of whether politics are money-powered or people-powered. We have someone who has been using her people power to effect change. Her name is Lisa Replogle, she is the chair of the Colorado River Tea Party, and we went to a candidate forum that they held in Yuma, Arizona. Hi, Lisa.

Lisa Replogle: Good morning!

Chideya: How do you feel, is this an exciting time for you?

Replogle: I don't think the word 'excitement' would be correct. What it is is a good time for us to start rolling up our sleeves and getting to work.

Chideya: What do you mean by that, what is the work that you have to do?

Replogle: Well, right now we have an opportunity to make a different kind of change, and get the United States back to the fundamental foundation of God and country and the constitution. We need to start defunding the programs that have started in this administration that we just cannot afford.

Chideya: Give me a couple of examples of things that you see as needing to go.

Replogle: Well right now the biggest one is Obamacare. Our nation can't afford this program. There are so many other things that can be done to help the uninsured but this isn't the right way to go.

Chideya: I'm actually going to keep you with us and turn to Melissa Harris-Perry who's a political analyst and a professor at Princeton. Do you have anything that you'd like to ask of Lisa?

Harris-Perry: It wasn't that I had something to ask but when you had asked the question about whether it was people powered vs. money powered I wanted to say we should talk about the Tea Party because there was incredibly interesting kind of populist moment that occurred both in 2008 and then again in 2010 and watching the ideological anxiety on each side about a very similar moment so many of the same things that propelled Barack Obama to the White House in 2008, an ability to go for small donations, a willingness to get new people in the system who had not previously thought about being in the system, a language about change, a language of the current policies were taking us off track, an economic downturn, literally structurally and political strategically, so many of the things that Barack Obama did for a win in 2008 showed up again in 2010 on the other side of the ideological aisle as the Tea Party and what I found nerve racking was the idea that that populism was bad and the Obama populism was good. They're both forms of populism, of people powered politics.

Chideya: Lisa, do you think you have more in common with the President than a lot of people might think?

Replogle: No, I really don't. The Tea Party movement was created out of an idea that we are upset with both parties and one of the things that I stress in every meeting is this is not an R&D issue, this is a constitutional issue, this is a getting back to the fundamental principles of liberty, life, the pursuit of happiness and freedom.

Chideya: Well Lisa, thank you so much. That's Lisa Replogle, Chair of the Colorado River Tea Party in Yuma Arizona. And just very briefly gentlemen, any thoughts about the Tea Party and whether or not the Tea Party movement will have legs and really continue?

Zwillich: I have not seen a bona fide grassroots movement like this. Legs, that depends. Over the next two years we have a pretty good idea that the economy will improve, not as fast as any of us wants to but as the economy improves, does that deprive the Tea Party and some of its motivation of some of the oxygen that propelled them. The core Tea Party leaders like your guest from Arizona, they'll still be involved in the Tea Party two years from now because they're core believers, they started it, they believe in the cause. What about the people who weren't previously necessarily involved in politics, if it's easier for them to get a job, if credit's a little bit looser, if the mortgage is loosening up a little bit, will they be quite as motivated? I don't know. That the movement is here to stay, how much gas it has is another question I think.

Chideya: Reihan?

Salam: I think that when you look at these kind of structural factors, they're going to enable all kinds of political movements and I think that we often forget...for example, in 1976 the great political fixation of then movement conservatives was the Panama Canal Zone Treaty. It's not an issue that we remember now but it's an issue that gave Ronald Reagan a great deal of credibility that helped him become the republican Presidential nominee in 1980 so there are all kinds of narrow discreet issues that are later forgotten but that nevertheless create relationships, create organizations, create structures that can be used for a variety of other things so I think that when you look at 2006 and 2008, you could say that folks on the left, net roots progressives and others, nets roots progressives were this little stratum of college educated voters on the left but then who were able to kind of build this infrastructure that other people including working class voters and African Americans were able to draw on during the Obama campaign.

Similarly the hope with the Tea Party movement for those of us on the right is that it could create the structure that other people could become a part of. During the early days of the anti war movement in 2003 it appeared to be a movement of marginal oddballs and then it became well a majority of the population as it mainstreamed and as more people came to embrace its conclusions and that's why I think that the effort to discredit the Tea Party movement as a movement of marginal lunatics etc. is actually so crucially important and that was one of the very important outcomes of the election.

When you look at who was actually focused on in the media narrative concerning the Tea Party, Christine O'Donnell, Sharon Angle, they lost. They lost by surprisingly large margin in Angle's case, by a predictably large margin in the case of the Christine O'Donnell whereas if you look at a Ron Johnson, whatever you think of as politics who defeated Russ Feingold, he's a different kind of character. If you look at Nicky Haley, South Asian woman, daughter of immigrants, CPA who was a narrowly elected governor of South Carolina who was very much an authentic Tea Partier as well, she was part of the narrative then but when you look at figures like this, could these be figures who then

mainstream, who then kind of broaden the Tea Party message to become a message that again, at the very early stage was a message that was trying to move away from culture war politics to this set of kitchen table issues.

Chideya: You know what, we're going to have to wrap it up for this segment but stay with us, we are going to be back after a short break with actor Rosie Perez and your questions. I'm Farai Chideya, you can check us out online with video from our road trips and more at [popandpolitics.com](http://popandpolitics.com). You are listening to Pop & Politics live from The Greene Space here at WNYC in New York City. We'll be right back.

\*\*\*\*\*

## SEGMENT B

\*\*\*\*\*

Chideya: Welcome back to Pop & Politics. I'm Farai Chideya and we are live in The Greene Space at WNYC. We are here with award winning stage and screen actor Rosie Perez. Rosie, thanks for coming back to WNYC in The Greene Space.

Rosie Perez: Thanks for having me.

Chideya: People know you from everything from the classic Do the Right Thing to Pineapple Express, but you have also gotten involved consistently in political issues, you're a member of the President's advisory council on HIV AIDS and recently you had your say in a video about New York State and gay rights.

Perez: Well, I basically was saying that it's embarrassing as a New Yorker that other states have the jump on us in regards to gay rights and I just thought that it was really embarrassing and shameful. People are people.

Chideya: You also made a point of saying don't think that Latino representatives should hold some kind of a right politics line in terms...I mean, left, right in terms of social conservatism. Do you think that the Latino communities sometimes gets stereotyped as being socially conservative against gay rights or what kinds of issues come up?

Perez: Yes, I think that we do get stereotyped in that and it comes from films, it comes from movies, it comes from books. Every time you see a Latin person in a movie they're crossing themselves or they're wearing a crucifix and it's really insulting. As a recovering Catholic myself, but no, seriously, I did shout out Senator Rubin Diaz because of his stand and it just isn't right and not every Latino in New York state feels that way and I think that not just myself, I think other Latino's need to come forward and have their voices heard as well.

Chideya: You know, one thing that we saw a lot of was just anger at other, the otherness, like whether it was Muslims in America, whether it was Latino's in Arizona, whether it was a black man in the White House, there's a lot of anger that seems to come up around the issue of identity. Did you perceive that and what do you make of it, what does it mean for America?

Perez: I think that history has shown us that in any time of economic crisis, the masses will point to the lesser than and blame them for the demise. Our borders aren't secure

and so therefore it's their fault. That drives me crazy. Why does everyone think that every illegal immigrant in the United States is Mexican? In just New York alone, how many illegal immigrants exist here in New York City. It's astounding. It's not Latino, there are Asian illegal immigrants, there are Russian illegal immigrants, Eastern European illegal immigrants. I don't understand why they're not made at the European illegal immigrants as well. There's so many French Bistros in Brooklyn it's disgusting. Now the Bangers and mash are coming but it's prejudice and when people fear the loss of their livelihoods it manifests itself in that way.

Chideya: I want to go to one of the questions we have from the audience. I'll ask that you introduce yourself, tell us what borough or town you're from and give us a question.

Rae Gombs: Hi, I'm Rae Gombs from Brooklyn. My question is since President Obama was elected, the commentary on race has been separated into two mien groups. Those who believe there's no need to talk about it anymore and those who know that there is still issues that are pressing and pertinent to discuss if we were to grow as a country and the latter is usually relegated to the side and their opinion discounted. How do we bring back intelligent discourse and race without getting knee jerk responses that ultimately fizzles it up altogether?

Chideya: I want to bring back a couple of guests that we have with us. We have Reihan Salam, a blogger for the National Review and Melissa Harris-Perry, professor of political science in African American studies at Princeton University, also with The Nation and MSNBC. Melissa, what do you think about that dichotomy?

Harris-Perry: Just poor President Obama truly gets just blamed for everything. I mean, the dichotomy that you just suggested did not occur when President Obama was elected any more than the recession occurred when President Obama was elected. That dichotomy of a group of people who believe that race is better not talked about and another group who wants to engage in conversation either good or bad about it has existed prior to Obama's birth right? So I think we just want to be careful about where we think of this genesis because it will help us to understand where those problems lie. I absolutely agree with Rosie Perez that the experience of the American story is ethnic balkanization in the context of economic downturn. We go to our own ethnic corners. On the other hand, we have got to take a deep breath because it is the best and worst of times simultaneously. It just is and it is okay to live simultaneously with those contradictions that there is a Latina on the Supreme Court right now. That there have only been 4 women on the Supreme Court in American history and three of them sit on the court right now that our President is in fact an African American, that in fact he did use his two appointments to appoint to. I mean, this is the best and the worst of times at the same time. It need not be just one. Now, you talk about bringing back reasonable racial discourse and I wonder...it sounds bizarre to me, like I'm trying to think about when that reasonable racial discourse was happening and will go bring it back. The fact is...

Chideya: 1976 to 1977?

[laughter]

Harris-Perry: It certainly wasn't then. Let me just suggest one possibility and that is part

of what I hear in the language of anger is about who gets to be angry. Part of what I hear in the language of immigration is about who are appropriate immigrants. Nikki Haley won in South Carolina. Marco Rubio wins in Florida, both of them with a very, very strong immigrant narrative and I think that those immigrant narratives are important.

It means that there's not just an overwhelming all immigrants are horrible, there's a way in which it matters and the notion that our current economic crisis is the basis for overwhelming populists anger requires us to ignore that in black and brown communities, 10% unemployment, huge loss of housing, destruction of neighborhoods and communities, all the things that we're seeing on a national scale have been par for the course for 20 years but when Michelle Obama said that she had not been proud of her country in her adult life, she was vilified for being angry with her country whereas now, as these negative economic consequences spread into white communities, it's perfectly acceptable to be angry with your country so I think part of it has to do with a question of who gets to stand as citizen and be angry with their country.

Chideya: Alright, Melissa, I have to go to Reihan just briefly. I want to give you your say.

Salam: As always I think that Melissa makes a very astute point. What I would add however is that how do we interpret anger at different moments in time. For example, in 2006, I think many people interpreted that election as a great repudiation of a party that represented intolerance and many other awful things but of course, that net roots progressive component that was socially liberal was only one part of the democratic coalition that year. When you look at a lot of the blue dogs that Melissa talked about earlier on, these were folks who were running aggressive China bashing campaigns.

Charles Schumer, our senator from New York, a very progressive and enlightened state, whipped up a lot of anger about a company called Dubai Ports World, a large multinational conglomerate that was accused of somehow enabling terrorism if it were to run ports in this country as it does throughout Europe, East Asia and many other places and so it's possible that that political outcome was related to some of that intense ferocious xenophobia that, by the way, is present in different times and you have people called swing voters who will vote for one party one year and one party another year and they are very responsive to appeals of that kind so I just think that it's kind of important to kind of use your filter and think about; well gee, we talk about it now and it sometimes seems as though we talk about it when it's convenient or when it fits a kind of set of fact or it fits a story that makes our team "look good" or the other team look bad and I just think that's kind of a useful thing to keep in mind. Xenophobia wasn't invented in 2010, it's been around for a long time. It's a very potent political force and it's deployed by a variety of political movements.

Chideya: Alright, I want to thank you both so much for joining us. Reihan Salam and Melissa Harris-Perry. I'm going to go to a question from Stephanie.

Stephanie: Hi, I'm Stephanie from Jersey City and Fort Lauderdale and I was just wondering with taking all of the election as a whole, the moderate Republicans seem to have been pushed out of the party. Where do they fit in? Where does someone like Olympia Snow and Susan Collins, where do people like that still fit in now?

Chideya: Thanks, Stephanie. We have a guest with us who can elucidate that question, a new guest, John Ridley. He is a film and television director and producer, political

commentator and blogger at [www.ThatMinorityThing.com](http://www.ThatMinorityThing.com), kind of a renaissance man. So John, What about the moderates?

John Ridley: I think the moderates in the Senate are going to matter even more right now and you look at what happened in Alaska where they were ready to basically throw Lisa Murkowski under the bus, she came back to the write in candidacy, so you have these individuals who basically were told again and again all these moderates who were told, and Arlen Specter, remember, he tried to be a moderate, he then switched parties, that obviously didn't work out, but there was not much room for moderates. Right now you have a very evenly divided senate. If either side wants to get anything done in the Senate they're going to have to turn to the moderates and right now the Senate is where things are going to get done. The House is going to be nuts for the next two years. The House is nuts under the best circumstances, it seems like this a republican grab but this is where most of these Tea Party candidates come in, I don't want to make pejoratives about them but the fact of the matter is is that they're going to have to be assimilated.

When you had the Blue Dog Democrats come in, remember that was going to be the best thing for the Democrats. It turned out to be a really difficult thing in terms of getting healthcare done, in terms of the deals that were getting made. The House is going to be nuts, it's going to be about the Senate, it's going to be about the President and it's going to be about the moderates. I think moderates are going to matter more now than ever before.

Chideya: Here's something I want to toss to both of you. We've been talking a bit about identity and there was this whole idea of the post racial America that was supposed to be on the horizon. You're chuckling, John. What happened to the post-racial dream and was it even a good dream to begin with?

Ridley: I honestly don't know too many people of color who were talking about post-racial America in 2008. That was always a comment I heard from white folks talking about post-racial America and I think I would split that into two. I think some were very helpful. It was this is going to great, this is going to be good, we're moving to a new place. There was another category I think when they were talking about post racial is like; hey, I don't want to hear about race anymore. Just stop it, we're done with that, we don't want to talk about it. We're a long way from post-racial and I think to me I'm not ready to be post racial because to say that in a way is to say now that people of color are really moving to the fore, our stories, our narratives, our histories, these are things that people are saying don't talk about that, we don't want to talk about it. So to me, I'm not ready for America to be post-racial and I don't say that in any kind of a militant fashion. I think post racial-America was a dream, and it should remain a dream for a while.

Perez: First of all, I do want to say that I agree with you to an extent. I did hear a lot of talk about race from people of color and it was usually the people who are upper middle class to pretty well off. They wanted the discussion to be closed. They wanted a post-racial America. It's about classism and classism plays out in an ugly, ugly way amongst people of color, amongst themselves and no one really talks about that. The great disdain that upward mogul individuals have for the hip hop community and generation is such that, and I heard a lot of wealthy African Americans and a lot of wealthy Latinos say; well, the President is now in office, the race issue should never be used as a crutch ever again and you're like; what is that about? I asked them how did you become

wealthy? Were you born into wealth? I would say one out of ten said yes. I think that we have to claim a little bit of that as well. I don't want to say his name but I remember a certain celebrity going on Oprah who was of color said; I told my sons ever since Barack Obama was elected you have no reason to use race as an excuse. I threw my slipper at the screen. I just couldn't believe it. That is that there. In regards to the fear of race in America, it goes to what I was saying and what Melissa is saying, it all comes down to money. I really all comes down to money and everybody wants to push out everyone because we're fighting for the crumbs that are on the table. But one thing that I don't understand about the corporations who funneled so much money into the Tea Party and into the republican campaign, if you want to breed capitalism here in American, funnel the money into the education system. If you were to take in that 4 billion dollars and put it into the education system here in America, you would breed more capitalists. You would have more well educated people and that's another issue that bothers me. A lot of people who are angry with Barack Obama, not giving him a chance, do not understand politics, do not understand democracy, do not understand how things are run, that's a really scary thing about America, more than race.

Chideya: I want to go to another member of the audience, again, please introduce yourself and give us your question.

Chap: Hi, my name is Chap, I work down here in the West Village at a school right down the block and my question is very connected to what you were both saying about racism and classism. When I think about the American dream, it's really hard to even thing about it when so many folks who consider themselves American have not even gotten a piece of the pie, haven't even been given a fork or a spoon to enjoy that pie at all. How do we begin to address the gaps that are still prevalent between white Americans and Americans of color, between straight Americans and LGBT Americans, between wealthy Americans and working class and poor Americans. There are still such prevalent gaps between those two groups of people who consider themselves American and yet we can't get to that American pie because we're not addressing those issues.

Ridley: If you're talking about access and you're talking about things like that, look, economic access is...there's another aspect to it. If you're talking about people of color, even who have economic access, if you are black for example and are making an equal amount of money as a white person, chances are you're still not getting the best access to healthcare. You will probably die younger and things like that so it goes beyond even that economic access. Here's my belief though, I will say this, people talk about us being left or right or what have you, I think some people would look at this election and maybe get a little bit nervous. America is a forward nation; it's a progressive nation, that's a fact. Women have the vote, they are part of society. Blacks are free. We're moving forward. We will continue to move forward. I can't help you with all those questions but I would say have hope in that regard that we will get past those things.

Chideya: Any final thoughts on this topic?

Perez: Yes, I think the knife and fork...I'll bring it back to education. What I've always said is what separates a privileged child from an underprivileged child regardless of race is opportunity and if you give that child an opportunity they will rise to the occasion each and every time. That is my personal belief. And that opportunity here in America is education and our education system right now is free but it is crap and I know that

personally, I have a charity, we work in 65 public schools here in the city and the outer boroughs and it is a shame, it is a crying shame, it's disgusting and it's what he says, it's clear, if you want to talk about race in America and opportunity disparages, go to the public school systems here in New York City. It is disgusting, it really is and you will see teachers treat the white students quite differently from the students of color and sometimes the pseudo liberal teachers are the ones that make me want to pull my hair out because they coddle and with kid gloves and they're so patronizing condescending to the kids of color and that screws with their mind...can I say that on radio?

Chideya: We'll find out.

Perez: I truly believe that and I just one day want to see equality for all and I'm so honored to be on this panel because you have such distinguished guests to day and I love your show so I wanted to get that in but I also feel like we say; oh it's so great that we have Sonya Sotomayor...no, it's not great. How old is this country and that's the first time we have a Latina on the Supreme Court? It's not great. For me, I don't think we're moving fast enough in regards to change.

Chideya: Rosie Perez, thank you so much. We really appreciate you coming out today. John Ridley stay with us and I'm Farai Chideya, this is Pop & Politics and you can check out videos and blogs posts online at [popandpolitics.com](http://popandpolitics.com). This is our post midterm election special live from The Greene Space at WNYC. We'll be right back. Thank you.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### SEGMENT C

\*\*\*\*\*

Chideya: Welcome back to Pop & Politics. I'm Farai Chideya and we are live in The Greene Space in New York City, WNYC. So we're talking about where America is headed after the midterm elections and I want to introduce you to someone who represents a new generation of voters. His name is Pedro Lopez, he's 18 years old and we were out walking around with him in Yuma Arizona, it was like 106 degrees. Pedro is now back in Phoenix, his hometown, and how are you Pedro?

Pedro Lopez: I'm going great, and you?

Chideya: I'm doing great. This was your first chance to vote. Did you vote?

Lopez: Yes, I did.

Chideya: How did it feel?

Lopez: Actually, it feels great. I was looking forward to it for several months and it feels good to choose those people to make the choices for us.

Chideya: Now, young voters didn't necessarily turn out in the highest numbers but you made a point of really focusing on...we went with you to a neighborhood where there were a large number of unregistered Latino voters, you focused on young voters, you focused on basically your extended community. How did you do in terms of registering voters? How many people were you able to reach over time?

Lopez: In Yuma Country it's really hard to organize so we were able to register over 800 people but across the state of Arizona registered over 13,000 new people.

Chideya: And so when you think about the results of the election, whether or not things turned out the way you want, do you still feel like you made a difference?

Lopez: Oh yeah, we made a huge difference. We turned out people to vote and we still have to keep organizing and organize it for our community so this was just the beginning so we're really motivated and we're going to keep voting until our voices are heard.

Chideya: Well, Pedro, thanks so much, appreciate it.

Lopez: You're welcome.

Chideya: That was Pedro Lopez, 18 years old, a fan of voting and so I want to go back and open up the floor here. We still got with us John Ridley, a political commentator and blogger at [www.ThatMinorityThing.com](http://www.ThatMinorityThing.com), we are also rejoined by Todd Zwillich the Washington Correspondent for The Takeaway, a morning show from WNYC and PRI and we also have with Erica Williams, deputy director of Progress 2050. You do, Erica, a lot of work on analyzing young voters, voters of color. Pedro I think, he just stands out in terms of his enthusiasm but what trends do we see among young voters, voters of color and young voters of color?

Erica Williams: First of all, thank you for having me. Pedro does stand out I think because of the amount of time and passion and energy he put into this particular election but he doesn't stand out from the millennial generation in terms of how he views civic engagement and civic participation. But the reason we add the lens of race and that's kind of the work that I do is because this general is very unique in that it is the most diverse generation this country has ever seen. It is predicted that by the year 2050 there will be no clear racial or ethnic minority. So for me that's very exciting and for obvious reasons but also for young people that's very exciting. I don't want to overstate this idea that young people are post racial, I heard that conversation earlier and I full agree, we are not yet post racial, don't know if I want to be post racial but I do believe that what we're seeing in young people and particularly among young people of color is a willingness to talk about these issues and a comfort in engaging on the issues of race and diversity by virtue of the fact that they are so diverse.

Chideya: Todd, when you think about where America is headed, one of the things that I always think about is the difference between the population of American and the people who represent them. There's always going to be a lag in terms of demographics so that the people in power often represent the demographics of an older generation and of people who have held power for a long time. Is that going to provide a point of tension in American right now?

Zwillich: Well, I don't know if it provides a point of tension per say, I think the major gulf right now in the short term appears to be between what voters say they want from Washington, we've all heard about angst and frustration, we mentioned it at the top of the show and it's been in every political newscast for the entire cycle. But the difference between what voters say they want from Washington and what they're likely to get from

Washington. I saw a CBS news poll just a couple of days ago that had something on the order of 75% of voters regardless of Tea Party voting, conservative voting, liberal voting said they wanted some form of compromise, they wanted Washington to just go and compromise to get things done. Do something. Now, that's what they want. Are they going to get it? We are poised over the next two years and I may be proved wrong, I don't have a crystal ball. The ingredients are in the capital and are in Washington for almost absolute gridlock.

Chideya: Alright, let's take another question.

Stanley: My name is Stanley and I'm from Jackson Heights. It seems to me that the difference between Franklin Roosevelt and Barack Obama's administration is that Roosevelt understood symbolic politics. He never solved the unemployment crisis of the depression but he created jobs directly with government's money and one of the questions that I have, especially since you had Pedro on, can this government do anything about jobs and especially what about young people? Do they have any future and if you think they do, what do you think the government can do?

Chideya: Alright, that's a big question. I'm going to start with you, John.

Ridley: Well, I think you make a good point that Roosevelt actually...there are obviously jobs programs that went out but the thing that really ended the depression and put people back to work was the Second World War. There tends to be some giant seismic shifts that either create jobs or create holes. Part of what created the whole that we're in are two wars that we were paying for along with tax cuts, obviously the real estate crisis as well but we dried up all this surplus that we had. Can the government create jobs? Can a President create jobs? Probably not, but can they create an environment where jobs and there is growth and can they create an environment where they can reduce some of the spending. Yes, they can. The big questions, and I think you make a good point, is now that you have all these people going to Washington saying we want to reduce, we want to do this, try to press anyone on what exactly they would cut and people will say things like; well, we want to cut a little bit of the bailout, we want to do this or that, that's like 14% of the economy. If you're not going after defense spending, Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security, you haven't even begun to cut anything and everyone...remember George Bush went in there saying; hey, I want to try to reform social security. Everybody freaked out and so the question is to really make these changes we can't get the little things done in Washington right now, can we really make these big cuts that we're going to need.

Chideya: Erica, can you frame it up in terms of younger Americans because for example there was a big article several months ago in The Atlantic that basically said; look, if you are someone who's coming of age during this downturn, your whole future is in jeopardy and your whole future earnings are in jeopardy, that's not a great message.

Williams: No, it's not a great message but I think the irony of that, and again, if you look at yesterday's turnout numbers and patterns, even prior to yesterday, the polling of how young people feel about Barack Obama, how young people feel about the progressive agenda, the irony is that even though young people are feeling the brunt of the economic crisis even though we have the highest unemployment rate even though we are delaying traditional life choices, not being able to move out of our parents home or if you were for

a brief second having to move right back in, even though we are facing the brunt of all of these ills, we were still the most optimistic and the most positive about the direction that the country was headed and I believe hopefully will continue to head in that progressive agenda. In 2009, The Center for American Progress did a poll polling young people age 18 through 29 about whether or not they supported increased investments in education, in healthcare and they did overwhelmingly so it appears that for right now young people do have quite a bit of hope. The same level of hope as 2008? I don't know. Hope in a campaign is very different than hope in governance. But I do think that this generation understands that and has a very balanced way of approaching politics and in civic life.

Chideya: We have Esther Arma, a fellow radio host here in New York. Introduce yourself.

Esther: Hello, good morning everybody. I'm a Brit, I'm a black Brit in New York, I'm an international journalist. The first is what I call the narrative about reclaiming America which I felt had that undertone of somehow America had been stolen and taken away somewhere never to be returned again by this man in the White House which I felt was a very specific narrative about race that was never really properly thoughtfully or intelligently addressed by any of the TV pundits who turned into prophets of doom around the way the democrats were going to die in this war, this midterm election war and the republicans were going to be resurrected to greatness.

Ridley: I'll try to do this quickly, and I want to be clear. When we get into race it's always a difficult subject. The Tea Party...in my opinion The Tea Party is the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth for 2010. They're here for a minute. They're not going to be around long. People say they did really well in the House selections. The fact of the matter is, historically speaking, the party in power is going to lose seats. I don't think it's going to be a long term change. Typically in a midterm election, people vote their resentments and their fears. In Presidential elections, people vote their hopes whether it's Clinton, whether it's Reagan, whether it's Obama, we're looking for what we need to be hopeful about. Talking about taking back America, reclaiming America, I agree with you 100%. I do think there is an undercurrent there that allowed that debate to go forward and attracted people. Not everyone in the Tea Party is a racist by any means but there's a codification that was there that was allowed to move forward, I think there was a love affair with the Tea Party both on the left and the right in the media, there were those who supported and those who reported on it because it was scary and more than anything I do think that within the Tea Party there was that ideal that we have to get something back that was truly not lost. It was a lot of entitlement that was disguised as victimization.

Chideya: Alright, we still have Rosie Perez with us. Rosie?

Perez: I just want to say that nobody is saying it, but you did say it but I just want to say it a little bit more clearly, and it's not just the Tea Party, there are also Republicans out there that lost their mind that we had a black President and that's a lot of the reaction that has come from it but I also want to state that it's also a lot of the senior citizens make up the Tea Party and I think that the issue of healthcare made them lose their mind because they thought that their Medicare was going to get messed with and I also want to say that it is easy to poke fun at the Tea Party. It's easy to just say they're all crazy and whatever but I don't think that they're going to be like this with voters I think

that they're going to be around for a little bit longer and we have to take heed to that and we have to take them seriously. It would be a very scary thing in my opinion if someone like Sarah Palin became President.

Ridley: Folks in the Republican Party do not want Sarah Palin to run. If she were a qualified candidate...

Zwillich: Sarah Palin raises money and she'll pick candidates to the extent that she can do that. She'll have enormous influence whether it's under the Tea Party banner or not.

Ridley: She will but interestingly enough there are two things that Americans can't stand right now, number one is TARP, number two is Sarah Palin. I'm not kidding. This is not something that I'm making up to joke, this is where it is right now. She has two years to change things, she could change things, I'm saying forget about how I feel or anybody feels about the Tea Party, I'm just talking about the difficulty of any third party really becoming a party and quite frankly I think we need a third or fourth party in this country because you do see, if nothing else, the Tea party is forcing both the republicans and the democrats to look at how they approach voters and that is a good thing in my opinion.

Williams: I just want to jump in and say one quick thing about that. About the narrative of take America back and how there was the undercurrent of race and it was interesting because it was not just take America back but take America back, like it was let's move back and that is not just about race. I don't know about you, but my history books don't say that the 50s, 40s and 30s were good for gay people, were good for women, it's kind of a world view that I think is very antithetical to a progressive America, it's very antithetical to diversity along all different lines and not just ethnic and racial.

Chideya: What's fascinating here, it's like we have so much territory to cover and when we went out on this project we literally covered hundreds of miles by automobile, going out and seeing different parts of America. New York is in some ways a mini America where you can meet somebody from Uzbekistan, somebody from Zimbabwe, somebody from the Upper West Side all in one place but in other ways we're just not. This is a big country so what lies ahead for the American dream? One of the things that's really been talked about a lot is the American Dream itself broken. Erica, what do you think?

Williams: You know, I don't know that the American Dream necessarily looks the same for everyone. The idea that here in America you can achieve what it is that you want to achieve through hard work and opportunity, this idea of a meritocracy, is that is what we're calling the American Dream then that's broken, I don't think it ever actually existed. If what we're talking about is equal access to opportunity, if that is what a dream is, no, that's not a broken dream, we just again have not yet achieved it and I do believe, I keep going back to this generation but I genuinely believe we're seeing...one of the trends I think we're going to start seeing because of the frustration with gridlock and with Washington that young voters have, is younger people starting to run for office earlier and earlier. We have not yet actually seen what the power of the millennial generation actually can do because many are just now coming of age. I think we'll actually start to see some of the fruition of what I believe is a true American Dream. When America begins to look differently, we'll begin to vote differently and then we'll live differently.

Chideya: John?

Ridley: I think the American dream is alive and well and I quite frankly think it's better than ever. We're going through a tough time, there's no two ways about it, but you look at where we are today and you look at where we were 20 months ago in this country.

You look at where we have same sex marriage, you look at the fact that yes, finally we have a Latino in the Supreme Court, not just a black man as a President, a biracial black man. I've always said, and I've gotten a lot of crap for saying it, Barack Obama is the most American President we've ever had. He really represents what this country is all about. The immigrant story, a biracial individual guy who came up from his boot straps, a single mother raising him largely, going to the best schools, going back to his community, doing that kind of work, ending up as President of the United States. These are tough, tough times. And maybe because I'm a little older now and I've got kids of my own now but knowing where we can go and what we can do and just things like even in this mess and people are saying; I'm not spending money the way I used to, I'm not just buying crap to buy crap, I'm paying down my debt, I got family moving back in, is that the worst thing in the world?

Chideya: Todd?

Zwillich: I think we may have deluded ourselves for the last few years as to what the American dream was. If it was defined through the ability to buy the hottest new car or the house that was too big is purely an economic question of the American Dream, then that dream has shifted in color or has reset. It might be a little bit different. Things like easy credit, houses that are too big, we've talked about those things. That version of the American Dream I think is changing, but I'm encouraged and, in fact, I'm encourage by something I saw in the Tea Party which is no comment on their politics whatsoever.

Political access, political influence. They have set examples that political organization and using your American democratic right to access law makers, in this case through elections and through money people should take that example and influence their law makers once they're in Washington and there's a dream to be had there too because it doesn't work that way in most places and as a journalist who spends time inside the bubble of Washington, D.C. which I do unfortunately, inside the bubble, it is refreshing and encouraging to have so much influence from the outside, truly change the face of congress and it doesn't matter your political stripe, you can take a less from that and that's part of the Dream too.

Chideya: Alright, I have to thank everyone on stage. We were talking with Todd Zwillich, Erica Williams, John Ridley as well as all of other guests who we've had here today. This has been Pop & Politics produced by Nona Willis Aronowitz, Aaron Ernst, Nellie Black, Ave Carrillo, Suzie Lechtenburg and Kerry Donahue and from The Greenee Space, Indira Etwaroo, Nikki Johnson, Ricardo Fernandez, Bill Porter, David McLean, Larry Yates, George Wellington, and Gaines Legare. Special thanks to our director Jenny Lawton and our interns Collier Meyerson, Christina Muldinado, Adee Braun and Selly Chum.

Pop & Politics is made possible with support from the Ford Foundation and the listeners of WNYC, with additional funding from the John S and James L Knight Foundation. I'm Farai Chideya, this is Pop & Politics, a co-production with WNYC Radio distributed by American Public Media. Thank you.