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**VIEWING U.S. POLITICS THROUGH THE LENS OF RACE
MINI SYMPOSIUM PUBLISHED IN *POLITICAL RESEARCH QUARTERLY***

Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC (December 5, 2008) The election of Barack Obama, America's first African-American president, was a watershed moment in U.S. racial politics. The election is being hailed as a statement about the progress America has made beyond destructive and divisive racial politics. But is the election really about transcending history? A Mini Symposium, "American Political Development through the Lens of Race," has been published in the December 2008 issue of [*Political Research Quarterly*](#) analyzing that question.

The articles in the Mini Symposium demonstrate that race has been a critical factor in most of the significant political developments in U.S. history. The articles cover a broad swath of America's history, placing race as a central factor in political development. And they go beyond merely claiming that race is important, to show how and why it has mattered:

- Daniel Mulcare discusses antebellum debates over national control and funding for internal improvements in his article, "Restricted Authority: Slavery Politics, Internal Improvements, and the Limitation of National Administrative Capacity."
- Edmund Fong's essay, "Reconstructing the 'Problem' of Race," places President Wilson's celebration of the semi-centennial of the battle of Gettysburg in conversation with Louis Hartz's fifty year-old classic examination of the role of liberalism in American politics.
- Joel Olson, in his article, "Whiteness and the Polarization of American Politics," analyzes the relationship between recent partisan and ideological polarization and the rise of the culture war phenomenon.
- Desmond King and Rogers Smith expand on the concept of racial orders, applying it to contemporary controversies over affirmative action and race-conscious congressional districts in their article, "Strange Bedfellows? Polarized Politics? The Quest for Racial Equity in Contemporary America."

"Obama's successes have emphasized the need for a national conversation about the significance of race in politics," writes guest editor Julie Novkov in the symposium's introduction. "We cannot get at questions about the potential for a post-racial state without a solid diagnosis of the role of race in political development. This broadly historical diagnosis shows the malleability of race relations over time, generating hope for the reconfiguration of racialized institutions, ideologies, and discourse."

The five articles in the December 2008 *PRQ* Mini Symposium, "American Political Development through the Lens of Race," guest edited by Julie Novkov of the University at Albany, SUNY, is being made freely available by SAGE for a limited time at <http://prq.sagepub.com/content/vol61/issue4/>.

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Political Research Quarterly (PRQ), the official journal of the Western Political Science Association (WPSA), publishes scholarly political science research. Focusing on local, national and global levels, the journal promotes the study and teaching of government and politics, to foster additional research and to facilitate the discussion of public affairs. <http://prq.sagepub.com/>

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