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Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics. By Michael C. Dawson. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. Figures, tables, acknowledgments, bibliography, index. Pp. xii, 234. \$35.00.)

In her 1993 majority opinion in *Shaw v. Reno*, the North Carolina congressional "racial gerrymandering" case, United States Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor offered neither empirical evidence nor conceptual rationale for her skepticism that most African Americans "think alike, share the same political interests, and will prefer the same

candidates at the polls." University of Chicago political scientist Michael Dawson examines both theory and facts in this rich analysis of survey data, most of which is taken from the 1984-1988 National Black Election Panel Study, a telephone survey of 1,150 African American adults. As the economic interests of the growing black middle class increasingly diverge from those of poorer blacks, will this new middle class—as O'Connor and such academic experts as William Junius Wilson in *The Declining Significance of Race* (1980) imply—turn against the welfare state and vote Republican?

Introducing an interesting cognitive psychological model of group opinion formation and testing it with sophisticated statistical tools, Dawson shows more convincingly than any previous account why Wilson's analysis is wrong. The long history of black individuals' continuing personal experiences with social and economic discrimination; the willingness of governments, compared to private businesses, to hire and promote African Americans; and the economic insecurity of those who only recently escaped poverty make black support of positive government rational for all classes. Those facts also alienate members of the new black middle class from anti-government politicians who deny the reality of discrimination and who promise to fire government workers and strip away every law and regulation that protects people from the vagaries of the free market. In reality, educated, upper-status African Americans are more likely than poorer blacks to identify with the Democratic Party and to see their own fates as linked with that of the race.

Indeed, Dawson's work suggests that the Right has succeeded in winning elections in the 1980s, and especially in 1994, not by converting the black middle class, but because poorer voters, black and perhaps white and Latino, abstained when Democrats could not deliver redistributive policies. Compared with the huge differences between the opinions and political behavior of whites and blacks—gulfs continually reinforced by opportunistic white politicians—African Americans are and are likely to remain politically classless.

J. Morgan Kousser

California Institute of Technology