THE RETURN OF THE REAGAN DEMOCRATS

Donald Trump held a rally in Warren, MI today, a blue-collar, largely white suburb of Detroit in Macomb County. The county, as a whole, is famous for what Democratic pollster Stan Greenberg dubbed the "Reagan Democrats" after lifelong white working class Democrats started flipping to the GOP in 1980, as he described in this study done on polling about Obama in 2008.

> In 1960, Macomb was the most Democratic suburban county in the country as John F. Kennedy won handily there, garnering 63 percent of the vote. Four years later, Lyndon Johnson increased the Democratic vote share even further, winning 75 percent of Macomb voters. But over the next 20 years, these voters turned on the Democrats, culminating with Ronald Reagan taking 66 percent of the vote in 1984.

Even before the election, Greenberg found Obama did worse with Macomb's voters than he did elsewhere. Greenberg even found some racial basis for that, though not as much as he had earlier. But Greenberg judged early on that Obama did so much better elsewhere in the state – primarily, with the young, but also by generating enthusiasm among African American voters – that it wouldn't matter.

> Obama is running 7 points ahead in our statewide poll conducted at the same time. Obama obviously will be able to count on immense enthusiasm and turnout among African Americans, but there is more going on than that – including Obama's over-performance in the growing suburban parts of the state, including Oakland County, where he is running a net 5 points above party identification and 9 points ahead of John McCain. Among

> young voters under 30 years, Obama defeats McCain 58 to 36 percent but Obama's success with younger voters is even broader.
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> He leads McCain among all voters under 40 years by 48 to 41 percent across Michigan and matches that margin in Macomb. Clearly, the rules of the game are a little different this year.

Sure enough, Obama did over-perform in the suburbs. So much so that after the election, Greenberg said so long to his Macomb Reagan Democrats, embracing, instead, the racially diverse (or at least tolerant) suburbanites who could replace them in the Democratic coalition.

> Oakland County has formed part of the Republican heartland in Michigan and the country. From 1972 to 1988, Democratic presidential candidates in their best years lost the county by 20 points. From Bill Clinton to John Kerry, however, Democrats began to settle for a draw. Over the past two decades, Oakland County began to change, as an influx of teachers, lawyers and high-tech professionals began to outnumber the county's business owners and managers. Macomb has been slow to welcome racial diversity, but almost a quarter of Oakland's residents are members of various racial minorities.
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> These changes have produced a more tolerant and culturally liberal population, uncomfortable with today's Republican Party. When we conducted our poll of 600 voters in Oakland County on election night, they were a lot more open than voters in Macomb to gay marriage and affirmative action. We asked those who voted for Mr. Obama why they made that choice. At the top of the list was his promise to withdraw troops from Iraq, followed by his support for

> tax cuts for the middle class and affordable health care for all, and the idea that he will bring people together, end the old politics and get things done.
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> On Tuesday, Oakland County voters gave Mr. Obama a 57 percent to 42 percent victory over John McCain — those 15 points translated into an astonishing 96,000-vote margin. That helped form one of the most important new national changes in the electorate: Mr. Obama built up striking dominance in the country's growing, more diverse and well-educated suburbs.
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> So, good riddance, my Macomb barometer.

But in elections since, Democrats have been doing worse and worse among whites and, in the interim years, losing elections as a result. By 2014, Greenberg was not so sanguine about Democrats' losing those white voters anymore.

> For example, a lot of blue-collar work today takes place in small groups rather than in factory settings, and most construction workers are self-employed contractors. Moreover, if by blue-collar jobs we mean jobs that involve routine and repetitive tasks, require limited skills, are closely supervised, and offer no autonomy during working hours, then it turns out that half of all white male workers and 40 percent of white working women are blue collar. Far from working on factory floors, more and more workers are employed in service-sector jobs like health care, leisure and hospitality, and, particularly, professional and business services.
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> If Democrats cannot figure out how to appeal to today's working-class voters, then they don't deserve to lead. Nearly all of the people in these jobs have not

> seen a raise in years. The majority of them, who now work in the service sector—maids and housekeepers, waitresses and hostesses, cooks and dishwashers, counter attendants and ticket takers, janitors and hairdressers and child care workers—earn, on average, about $400 a week.

At that point, the GOP wasn't even doing all that well with these voters. But they are now, with Donald Trump, returning today to the site of Reagan's victory with the support of a bunch of working people arguably voting against their economic interest. Trump is speaking the language — significantly, of building infrastructure, and not just his damned wall — that would appeal to this group in a way the GOP had foresworn. And in Macomb, as elsewhere, Trump's voters are his voters, largely detached from either party and thus far unimpressed with the dirt the GOP threw last night and reportedly will start throwing in abundance in the near future. Trump seems to recognize he has a limited window of time to win out before the shit gets really deep, and he stands a very good chance of doing just that.

And there is a real reason to be concerned that it will lead to victory for the GOP in November.

Thus far, we're seeing Democratic turnout down, significantly, and GOP turnout up even more. That comes, in large part, because white voters — thus far we've had voting in the South, so these consist of what this analysis calls old-style Dixiecrats as well as Trump cross-overs — are turning to Donald Trump. Worse, we're not seeing the kind of turnout among people of color, not even African Americans, that Democrats have been presuming would build a permanent firewall against GOP victories.

> So it's absolutely imperative that we find some way to do three things:
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> - *Bring back some form of*

> *the Obama effect on African American turnout, so it does not fall (as it did in South Carolina).*
> - *Give younger voters the motivation to actually turn out and vote.*
> - *Effectively fight the Trump effect, and stem the anti-establishment exodus of working class whites to the GOP, and to Trump.*
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> If we can't find a way to do that, then in the outer South:
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> - *North Carolina will not be remotely competitive.*
> - *Virginia won't lean Dem, and could be a true tossup or even lean R.*
> - *Florida won't really be a tossup, but will probably lean reasonably R as in 2004 (unless gains among Hispanics are fully strong enough to offset the Trump effect in North Florida and the drift of older retirees to the GOP).*
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> That's enough by itself to return the electoral college map to something more

> similar to what we had in 2000 and 2004. And if the Trump effect is strong in places like Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, then we could have a real fight on our hands, without any clear reason to think we have the upper hand.
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> In other words, with Trump on the GOP ballot and Obama off the Dem ballot, the Obama coalition could come tumbling down and crash into pieces. That "blue wall" we liked to think made America safe from another George W. Bush? Gone. History.

But even in MA, Trump drew those working class whites in YUGE numbers.

Bernie probably had a shot at winning among white and black and brown working people. Partly because the Democrats launched Republican attacks on sound policy, partly because Bernie didn't listen to people of color enough, and partly because Trump had an easier sell to the white working class, he won't pull it off.

Which will leave Hillary and Oakland's voters (or, in parallel fashion, huge wins in the most affluent Military Industrial Complex suburbs of VA).

Democrats risk losing this election, once again to Reagan's Democrats. If Trump wins, it may also be a realignment election, where Democrats become the party of those suburbs while Trump feeds the fears of those working towns. As Greenberg said, Democrats don't deserve to win if they're not offering solutions for those working class service workers, of all classes.

And thus far, Democrats haven't convinced sufficient numbers they do.