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THE HARRIS SURVEY

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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN....

By Louis Harris

Very interesting
NOT BEFORE

If next November's election for President is going to be a close one, as all signs now indicate, then the selection of the candidates for Vice President can take on added importance. And, in this unorthodox political year, it is entirely possible that a black, a woman, or a person of Spanish or Italian descent might be picked to run.

A recent Harris Survey tested the extent to which voters might object to various types of potential candidates for Vice President. The technique used was one first developed in 1960 to test the extent of anti-Catholic feeling against John F. Kennedy as a potential occupant of the White House. Instead of asking whether people favored or were opposed to a Catholic as President, the survey asked voters if they "strongly objected to, objected only somewhat, or only a little" to a Catholic as chief executive. Back in 1960, 30 per cent of the voters nationwide objected to a Catholic President. The burden of stating "do not object" was left to each individual interviewed to volunteer such a feeling. The reason for this way of asking the question is that a number of people are ill at ease in expressing what some might feel is a prejudice based on race, sex or ethnic origin.

Applying this same technique in 1976, here are some of the surprising results obtained by the Harris Survey:

--Running a black candidate for Vice President would be objected to by only 25 per cent of the public. A substantial 72 per cent volunteered that they would have "no objection" to a black on the ticket. However, in the South, this number shrinks to 59 per cent and in the deep South to 49 per cent. In political terms this means that a candidate who picks a black running mate would have to be prepared to write off the five states of the deep South.

What other political effects would the choice of a black vice-presidential candidate have? For Jimmy Carter, selection of a black would entail the greatest risk, since his primary base in the electorate is in his native South. Although he has built a remarkable coalition of black and white southern backing, a real question is whether he can afford to risk his white southern support by choosing a black running mate. On the national level, a black vice-presidential candidate would raise the Democratic margin among blacks to the record 1964 division of 95-5 per cent. Because blacks are 10 per cent of the electorate, such a 90 per cent edge among blacks could put the Democratic ticket 9 full points ahead in the popular vote before the white vote was counted. Normally, of course, the Democrats cannot count on more than a 70-30 per cent margin nationally among blacks, so a black on the ticket would add 5 points just from the black vote alone.

What would there be in it for Gerald Ford if he names a black as his running mate? From tests made by the Harris Survey, with Senator Edward Brooke of Massachusetts as Ford's running mate, the black vote nationally would go from 70-30 per cent Democratic to 60-40 per cent Republican. Instead of beginning with a 4-point deficit before the white vote is counted, the GOP could count on a 2-point lead. That adds up to a swing of 6 full points, a major consideration in an election that could go 52-48 per cent either way.

--Naming a woman for Vice President would be a little harder to do than nominating a black. Nationwide, 30 per cent would object to a woman running mate, although 69 per cent would have no objection. A woman for Vice President in 1976 would be the equivalent of running a Catholic for President in 1960. John F. Kennedy made it, of course, and so might a woman. Again, the trouble area would be the South, where 41 per cent would object to a woman and only 56 per cent would not object.

--A Jewish vice-presidential candidate would meet with opposition from 20 per cent of the public, although 76 per cent would not object. Again, in the South, a much larger 33 per cent would object to a Jew on the ticket.

--An American of Spanish descent for Vice President ends up precisely the same as a Jewish candidate, objected to by 20 per cent nationwide, with a higher 27 per cent in the South and 33 per cent in the deep South. A substantial 76 per cent would not object to such a move.

--A Catholic for Vice President evokes no more than 12 per cent who would object to such a candidacy, although in the deep South objectors rise to 24 per cent, double the national average. An Italian Catholic would have 17 per cent nationwide against him and 29 per cent in the South. A Polish Catholic would be only marginally more acceptable than an Italian Catholic.

The conclusion to draw from these tests is that any candidate for President would be taking some risks in naming a black, a woman, a Jew, an Italian, or a Pole as his running mate. But such a move would also be viewed as an act of courage by that candidate. And it is just possible that the net political gain among minority groups and in the North might more than offset losses in the deep South.

[INSERT TABLE A]

TABLE A

The Harris Survey recently asked a cross section of 1,523 adults: "Would you strongly object, object only somewhat, or only a little to having (READ LIST) as Vice President of the United States for the next four years?"

	Strongly Object	Only Some- what Object	Object		(Vol.)	
			Only a Little	Not Object	Not Sure	
	%	%	%	%	%	%
A woman	14	8	8	69	1	
A black	13	6	6	72	3	
An American of Spanish descent	8	5	7	76	4	
A Jew	9	5	6	76	4	
An American of Italian descent	6	6	5	79	4	
An American of Polish descent	6	5	6	80	3	
A Catholic	4	3	5	85	3	

Given the fact that 30 per cent objected to a Catholic running for President in 1960, and that a Catholic won, the country is far more open for a minority-group vice president in 1976.