

BLACK FOLKS AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

In 1911, President Woodrow Wilson wisely observed:

A nation which does not remember what it was yesterday, does not know what it is today, nor what it is trying to do. We are trying to do a futile thing if we do not know where we came from or what we have been about.

It is a sadly, misunderstood historical fact that it is the Republican Party, not the Democrats, that has fought untiringly for the recognition of Black Americans as full, productive citizens of this country.

One of the more expected statistics of Presidential Election 2000 was the cohesiveness of the African-American vote: blacks supported Democrats with a percentage higher than any other voting block. For example, among traditional Democratic constituencies, union members voted for Democrats by a margin of 62 to 34 percent, and homosexuals by a margin of 70 to 25 percent, but African-Americans voted for Democrats by a margin of 90 to 9 percent. Judging by such results, one could easily assume that blacks have a long tradition of support for Democrats. Such, however, is not the case.

Following a vote in Congress to extend slavery into the Northwestern Territory in May, 1854, twenty House Members coalesced themselves into a group they titled "The Republican Party." Its declared purpose was to support the original anti-slavery principles of the federal government. The first Republican Platform (1856) therefore declared:

Resolved. *That with our Republican fathers, we hold it to be a self-evident truth that all men are endowed with the*

inalienable right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . . . That, as our Republican fathers, when they had abolished slavery in all our national territory, ordained that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, it becomes our duty to maintain this provision of the Constitution against all attempts to violate it for the purpose of establishing slavery.

(Significantly, six of the nine planks in the original 1856 Republican Platform condemned slavery or focused on securing equal civil rights for all.)

Although in 1858, Abraham Lincoln lost the senatorial election to Stephen Douglas, two years later in 1860, he won the presidency against Douglas, and for the first time Republicans became the prominent party in Congress. Under Lincoln's leadership, the Republican vision of equality moved forward with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, followed by subsequent civil rights bills passed by the Republicans in Congress.

The Republican Platform of 1864 on which Lincoln was re-elected continued its original opposition to slavery, even advocating a constitutional amendment to abolish that evil:

That proposed amendment became reality when, as the Civil War was drawing to a close in 1865, the Republicans enacted the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery. However, because Southern Democrats sought to evade the civil rights guarantees intended by the 13th Amendment, Republicans subsequently passed the 14th and 15th Amendments guaranteeing civil rights and securing voting rights for all former slaves.

There are many other examples of how blacks achieved numerous political firsts within the Republican Party; and so great were the gains of blacks in the Republican Party that in 1866, the Ku Klux Klan was formed to battle both

Republicans and blacks with the declared purpose of breaking down the Republican government and paving the way for Democrats to regain control in the elections. As a result, blacks were terrorized by murders and public floggings (relief was granted only if blacks promised not to vote for Republican tickets, and violations of this oath were punished by death), and Republican officials were attacked both at home and at the office. In fact, in 1866, Democrats, in conjunction with the mayor and the city police, attacked a Republican Convention of blacks and whites in New Orleans where they killed 40 and wounded 150.

In historical retrospect, the story of the Republican Party is largely of their opposition to slavery and racism while that of the Democratic Party is largely of their support for it. Similarly, African Americans made their most significant political and civil rights progress while affiliated with the Republican Party.

THE THREE-FIFTHS CLAUSE

Democrats and Black leaders have historically pointed to this portion of the Constitution as prove that the framers were racists and intentionally demeaning to African Americans. This is based on the belief that the three-fifths clause of the Constitution was a pro-slavery provision - a provision declaring blacks to be only three-fifths of a person.

The Constitution allowed one Representative to Congress for each 30,000 inhabitants in a State. Since slaves accounted for more than half the population in some Southern States, slave-owners in the South therefore wanted to count slaves as if they were free inhabitants, thus potentially doubling the number of their pro-slavery representatives to Congress. The abolitionists from the North strenuously objected to counting the slaves, knowing that the fewer the pro-slavery representatives in Congress, the sooner slavery could be eradicated.

Interestingly, the anti-slavery Founding Fathers, in debating this representation question, actually used many of the South's own arguments against them. Adopting the Southern arguments that slaves were property it was argued that since "Negro slaves. . . . are no free agents, have no personal liberty, no faculty of acquiring property, but on the contrary, are themselves property, and like other property, entirely at the will of the master," then those slaves should not be used to calculate representation to Congress because, according to "the true principles of representation," legislative assemblies were the result of citizens sending representatives as their "substitutes." Since slaves could not attend a meeting of citizens or send a substitute in their stead, they therefore should not be used to allow slave-owners to gain more representatives to Congress.

Further exploiting the absurdity of the Southern reasoning, other anti-slavery Founders argued that if slaves were nothing more than property but still were to be counted for the purpose of congressional representation, then livestock in the North should also be included as the basis of calculating Northern representation.

It was slavery's opponents who succeeded in restricting the political power of the South by allowing them to count only three-fifths of their slave population in determining the number of congressional representatives. The three-fifths of a vote provision applied only to slaves, not to free blacks in either the North or South.

Clearly, the three-fifths clause was only a ratio used to calculate the amount of representation and had nothing to do with the worth of any individual.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS AND VOTING RIGHTS ACTS OF THE 1960S

The first civil rights act was that of 1866, passed by Republicans in Congress, making it illegal to deprive a person of civil rights because of race, color, or previous servitude. Subsequent civil rights laws were passed by Republicans in 1870, 1871, and 1875 to allow the national government in Washington, D.C. to protect black Americans from white-dominated Democrat Southern State governments.

FAMILY VALUES, BLACKS, AND PARTY POLITICS

The history of blacks in the American political process shows that blacks were originally drawn to the Republican Party for its values and made their greatest strides in civil rights and elected representation under the Republican Party, but by economic allurements begun under President Roosevelt, were finally enticed to join the Democratic Party. Notwithstanding their change in party affiliation, the current values of African-Americans not only are generally more conservative than those of whites but are still best represented by the Republican rather than the Democratic Party. For example, recent polls demonstrate that blacks:

- oppose the legalization of marijuana by a margin of 75% to 21% (while whites oppose it by a margin of 73% to 24%);
- support English as the official language by 84% to 15% (whites by 82% to 16%);
- support a constitutional amendment to return prayer to schools by 80% to 17% (whites 71% to 26%);
- oppose same-sex marriages by 71% to 23% (whites 66% to 29%);
- support educational choice by 73% to 24% (whites 57% to 39%);
- support a flat tax by 51% to 24% (whites 52% to 44%).

Additionally, blacks:

- support the death penalty by 64% to 31% and
- support a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution by 75% to 24%.

Ironically, the Democratic Party - as demonstrated both by its platform and by its voting record in Congress - not only opposes school prayer, educational choice, a flat tax, and a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution but also supports same-sex marriages - all positions opposite to those held by most blacks. While African-Americans currently have more in common with Republicans than with Democrats, it has been a lack of knowledge of the political history of African-Americans that has allowed the current fallacious misportrayals to be accepted.

SUMMARY

In short, an historical review of black involvement in the political process demonstrates that: (1) African-Americans made their greatest political advancements in the Republican Party (in fact, while Democrats have talked the talk, Republicans have walked the walk); (2) the three-fifths clause was not a racist, pro-slavery provision in the Constitution but rather was an abolition part of the Constitution; (3) the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of the 1960s were the product of Republicans, not Democrats, and therefore were not in danger from Republicans in any election; and (4) black values generally continue to be conservative and are best reflected by the values expressed in the Republican rather than the Democratic platform.

Even though it was Democrats who actually committed the racial injustices of which they accuse Republicans, many today believe just the opposite, thus affirming a statement attributed to William James (the father of modern psychology):

There is nothing so absurd but if you repeat it often enough, people will believe it.

Now, more than ever, President Woodrow Wilson's declaration is true:

A nation which does not remember what it was yesterday, does not know what it is today, nor what it is trying to do. We are trying to do a futile thing if we do not know where we came from or what we have been about.

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