

Black Voters are Back in Style

Written by James Clingman
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The push for the Black vote is on. Black folks are back in style. Black is beautiful – again. Since the last election, the mantra has become, “Get more ‘minorities’ to vote Republican” and Black voters are at the top of that list.

Yes, they want to increase their Hispanic support, but the African American vote is ripe and ready to be harvested by just the right message given by just the right messengers. Wow, that sounds familiar. Don’t Democrats have that same strategy? They trot out a couple of spokespersons to soothe us with convincing platitudes that have kept us in their corner for decades.

Now the Republican sleeping giant has finally awoken, and it is ready to do whatever it takes to regain Black voters’ confidence and support. They have launched a new Black political role model into the limelight; he is an icon among Black people, a hero, Horatio Alger personified, and his name is Dr. Ben Carson. He was the darling of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) convention and is the new love of Sean Hannity’s life. Fresh off his in-your-face, Mr. President, speech at the national prayer breakfast, Carson has decided to quit medicine and pursue “other” interests. The Republicans are already drafting him for the 2016 presidential race.

To rub salt into the wound, some Black commentators and columnists are suggesting that Black voters should seriously consider moving from the Democrat plantation to the Republican plantation, and the chairman of the Republican Party, Reince Priebus, has a plan to make that happen. So does Rand Paul. Both of them have said Republicans must get more Black people to remember what their party has done for us, and bring us back into their “big tent.” Yes, we are definitely in vogue these days.

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The question is: What are we going to do with our newfound popularity? When political parties compete for your votes, you win. I wonder what the Democrat response will be to this Republican incursion. After 75 years or so of unbroken Black voter loyalty, the battle lines have been drawn by Priebus, who has set out to do what Michael Steele could not do with “fried chicken and potato salad:” get more Black folks to vote Republican.

Why is it always an either/or choice between Black folks being a Republican or a Democrat? It seems to me that Black people, especially, should always be independent and willing to support either party if, of course, both parties address the interests and needs of Black people. Notwithstanding the opposing arguments regarding what Presidents Lincoln, Eisenhower, and Nixon did for Black people versus what Presidents Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Johnson did, we should base our voting on interests rather than parties. Our unique position and genesis in this country demand political independence rather than political allegiance to anyone or any party. It’s all about reciprocity, and the last time I checked, Black people have yet to receive even a reasonable return on our investment in the U.S.

Our American experience is unique. No other group has committed so much to, worked so hard for, fought and died in wars for America, and received so little in return. Other groups did not go through what we went through, and our right to play in the political game was bought and paid for hundreds of years ago. However, this is still, above all, a capitalistic society, and economics rules the day. If we take care of business in the economics arena, the political arena will be easy pickings.

Heed the words of T. Thomas Fortune, a journalist and co-founder of the National Negro Business League: “No people ever became great and prosperous by devoting their infant energies to politics. We were literally born into political responsibility before we had mastered the economic conditions which underlie these duties.”

His message is clear. We are not even in the political game because we do not use our political leverage to get what we say we need. All we get back from our “precious” votes is a good feeling, which could be characterized as having sex rather than making love. Black people are in love with our political party; and our party is just having sex with us.