Ya’ Down Wit G.O.P.? (No, you don’t know me.)

October 27, 2011 By Larry Bryant

“Is G.O.P. the new Black?” Really?

According to Apostle Claver Kamau-Imani, Chairman and Executive Director of RagingElepants.org, this question is a no-brainer. According to the Apostle, who proclaims to be “Leading America’s 2nd Emancipation”, him and his followers are:

Dedicated to advance the cause of conservatism-libertarianism by growing the ranks of conservative voters through RACIAL DIVERSITY. We envision a rejuvenation of conservatism by seeing more Americans of color join the movement.

Sounds great! Especially when you are reminded quite boldly through his website and billboards throughout the predominantly Black and poor communities of south Houston that “Martin Luther King Jr. was a Republican!” Although more recent examples of Black conservative Republicans like Clarence Thomas, Alan Keyes, Michael Steele, and Herman Cain may leave an immediately bitter taste.

So, while engaging in discussion on this “Raging” topic at the 2011 incarnation of the ’water-cooler’ (Facebook), it made me wonder out loud: *What is the voting and political image of Black America?*

I mean, after all, we have a Black President. He is a Democrat. Therefore Black people are Democrats, right? Maybe. However if African Americans only voted (in historic fashion, by the way) for Barack Obama because he is the ’Black guy’, isn’t it fair to assume that an equally articulate, genuinely intelligent, self-aware candidate from the right who can make a jump shot on ESPN could make a similar impression? Are we as a Black community defined by our options or are we defining the characteristics of those who run for office? Or are we attracted to the better marketed candidate? A major factor in Obama’s rise popularity and elected office and appeal is not only in the way he speaks, his intellectualism, and his cross-over charm. It’s most importantly due to his campaign’s ability to market and package those qualities in a fresh and exciting way to a younger, more diverse audience. But does that mean Black people would never vote for the same candidate if he were Republican?

Historically it seems both parties have gone through immense changes that have perception, at

least, of doing a 180 degree turn. From its founding in 1854, the Republican Party was the anti-slavery party. Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, wrote the Emancipation Proclamation and freed the slaves. And Dr. King, as well as most leading Blacks of his time were aligned with the Republican Party for primarily these reasons.

The Democrats fought to keep Blacks in slavery and passed the discriminatory Black Codes and Jim Crow laws. The Democrats started the Ku Klux Klan to lynch and terrorize Black people throughout the South. The Democrats also fought to prevent the passage of every civil rights law beginning with the civil rights laws of the 1860s, and continuing with the civil rights laws of the 1950s and 1960s.

How times have changed.

So who are we today? What is our political persona and how are we seen by those running for state and Federal office? Is the Black community too diversely defined to narrow it to clarify the 'Black vote'? It seems with issues connected to major and deadly disparities in education, employment, incarceration, and health as defined by being Black in America, neither party has done a particularly good job. This includes HIV & AIDS funding, prevention, care, and education.

Despite the serious play for votes from the Black community from both sides of the campaign aisle - Michelle Bachman has said that she would be a better President for Black people than our Black President - however not serious enough when it comes to actually policy change.

Again it comes back to who we are and what role we as a Black community - diverse in Faith, economics, education, and culture - can do to define the characteristics of the candidate that seeks our votes. Do we care? Can that influence exist? Or are we spread too thin because of our diversity and experience?

I am curious to hear your thoughts.

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