

GOP completely ignores blacks in post-election strategy

Written by Sam Fulwood

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I've heard plenty about the GOP's wish to attract more Latino voters. Noting that President Barack Obama won "a stunning 71 percent of the Latino vote on Election Day," former Speaker of the California Assembly Fabian Núñez confessed in a recent Huffington Post essay that he was mistaken to predict that the Republican Party would have a challenge to get Latino votes. No, he wrote, "It turns out I was wrong. Republicans don't have a problem; they have a crisis."

Some within the party seem to have gotten the message and now want to make nice with Latino voters. Just days after the election, a line of Republican leaders such as former Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, a party elder, and conservative talk show host Sean Hannity urged the GOP to put aside opposition to immigration reform that opens a path to legal status for undocumented workers. House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) quickly agreed, telling reporters "a comprehensive approach is long overdue."

But apparently the same logic doesn't apply to black voters. Black voters cast a ballot for President Obama over Republican presidential candidate and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney by a 9-to-1 margin—a significantly bigger disparity than Latino voters. In some largely black and urban areas, Gov. Romney failed to get even a single vote. But in all of the post-election analysis, I've discerned precious little interest in a Republican outreach to African-American voters.

I fear the party has sadly concluded that black voters are totally beyond its grasp. If so, they may be hoping to cleave a slice of the Latino voting populace. In effect, the GOP hopes such a plan would produce a majority in presidential elections by finding common ground with enough Latino voters who would be acceptable within their bloc of white and Southern voters. That, in turn, would leave black and urban voters entirely to Democrats.

This isn't a far-fetched idea. The formula for this transmogrification was noted in historian Noel Ignatiev's classic book, *How the Irish Became White*. Ignatiev's work documents how deliberate

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political moves early in the 20th century allowed some European immigrants to shed an undesirable status by separating themselves from and displaying overt hostility toward a more despised other: black Americans.

Such a view seems to be supported by the drumbeat of bad news in the weeks following the election regarding the GOP's relationship with black voters. GOP leaders seemed to have doubled down on insulting and isolating black voters.

Last weekend, The Palm Beach Post reported that GOP activists in Florida passed laws claiming to combat voter fraud but which in reality were intentionally meant to inhibit traditionally Democratic voters. The report gave a lift to widespread fears among many voting-rights observers who suspected GOP activists were working to prevent black voters from exercising their franchise in the state by passing the law, which contributed mightily to long lines and forced some people to abandon voting at all. Rather than courting black voters, it seems some in Florida would just as soon as block them from going to vote at all.

The newspaper also reported that former Republican Party of Florida Chairman Jim Greer said he attended meetings beginning in 2009 where party officials pushed for the law to limit Democrats in general and black voters in particular from voting early and in large numbers.

"The Republican Party, the strategists, the consultants, they firmly believe that early voting is bad for Republican Party candidates," Greer told the Post. "It's done for one reason and one reason only. ... 'We've got to cut down on early voting because early voting is not good for us.'" Greer said he was told by those staffers and consultants.

(Greer is under indictment, accused of stealing \$200,000 from the state GOP through a phony campaign fundraising operation. He, in turn, has sued the party, saying officials knew what he was doing and voiced no objection.)

Then, of course, there's another strategy. Even when accomplished black leaders rise to prominence, there are some mossbacks seeking ways to discredit them. How else to explain the tag-team dissing of U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice by Republican Sens. John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. Their crude act has done little good and a lot of harm to the reputation of the party with black voters.

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So far, the tepid approach to solving the GOP's black-and-brown issues is what I call the "Bobby Jindal Solution." By promoting its growing roster of elected officials with minority or ethnic heritage, such as Jindal, the Louisiana governor, some in the Republican Party seem to believe that a dark face is the only necessary solution to selling unpopular policies in non-white communities.

Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell, the former head of the Republican Governors Association, embraces that concept, bragging recently that his party is actually more diverse than Democrats, if you judge by counting governors.

"They have I think two women and minorities," he told reporters covering the association's recent meetings. "We have seven. And, so, we're not keeping score but the point is that the people that are coming in.

"We are keeping score, 30 to 19 though," he continued as the reporters interrupted with laughter. "That's the score that matters. But the point is the people that are coming in and are now the leaders of our party reflect a much more diverse group than the Democratic governors today."

I doubt such Machiavellian moves will succeed. If for no other reason than that the just-completed election offered a glimpse of the future for African-Americans and Latino politics in a browning America.

What's more, Republicans have proven to be their own worst enemy. The strategy to win over minority voters will be to lure, not repel them, with programs and priorities. Indeed, Republicans have tried to plaster a colored face on bad policy and mean-spirited rhetoric before.

Ask former Florida Rep. Allen West, a Republican and Tea Party darling who lost his seat after one term in Congress, how that worked out for him.

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