

Splendor of Truth: Where are the Minorities in the GOP?

Among the current crop of candidates competing for the Republican nomination, not one is female and not one is a minority. In contrast, the two leading contenders for the Democratic nomination, Hillary and Obama, are both members of previously marginalized groups; their campaigns are breaking new ground. This speaks volumes on how poorly Republicans have fared in transforming their party to accommodate recent demographic and social trends. Also, this tells us that minorities are not fully assuming their civic responsibilities and are not doing enough to ensure adequate representation in both parties.

In the 2004 election, Democrats surpassed Republicans in every single category of minority voting. African Americans voted wholesale for the Democrats, with only 11% siding with the GOP. This pattern is so well established in general elections that Republicans do not even bother to court African American voters. Sadly, neither do Democrats give African American issues much attention for Democrats believe they have this constituency securely in their camp. Hence, African American voters are ignored by one party and taken for granted by the other; consequently, key issues affecting their communities do not come to national attention.

Latino's have been more successful at dangling their vote amongst both parties and have therefore drawn greater attention to their concerns. Nonetheless, 55% of Latinos in 2004 voted for the Democratic Party. This occurred despite Bush's longstanding effort to court Hispanics. He occasionally even breaks out in Spanish and chuckles—demonstrating a heartfelt sympathy with Hispanic culture. His numerous attempts to resolve the issue of illegal immigration are driven both by the desire to address a matter of primary national importance and a genuine concern to assist Hispanics. Yet, despite his bold and generous legislative initiatives, Latinos remain nonetheless mostly wedded to the Democrats.

Republicans also failed to secure a majority of female votes in the 2004 election but by a lesser margin: 48% of women voted for the GOP. This gap is astonishing, however, when we examine the voting patterns of non-white females: 75% of these voted for the Democratic Party. It is mostly this inability to appeal to non-white women that accounted for the GOP failure to secure a majority of female votes. They did better with white women as 58% of these favored the Republicans. We have to ask, therefore, why does the GOP fare so badly with non-white female

voters? How dramatically could the GOP change its record with minorities if it took a little more interest in discovering how to appeal to minority women?

These statistics are symptomatic of a larger phenomenon: a polarization of American politics between camps that are sharply divided not only by ideology but by race and gender as well. The Founding Fathers did not envision a society where the two parties would be so deeply at odds on such fundamentals. The national consensus which makes American institutions run smoothly has gradually been undermined. Even Christianity which was held dear by both parties has become factionalized as a majority of Christians now vote for the Republicans—thus introducing another aspect to this social and political separation, the “religious gap.”

The danger in all this is a society where rather than the two parties competing on the best means to implement policies of mutual agreement, the competition becomes one based on a diametrically opposed view of the fundamental nature of the state and of the very nature of the society that is being created: the parties thus compete on different views of the ultimate end goal. This breeds an ugly kind of factionalism and a cycle of institutional disintegration which can occasionally lead to civil war—as occurred in the Roman republic and during the English Civil War. This kind of divisiveness is also more reminiscent of European democracies than of the ideals that inspired the founding of the Great American Republic.

The Republican Party cannot simply stand still in its platform and ignore the ever-changing face of America. The notion that one set of ideas can accommodate all Americans is a good one in defining citizenship, but insufficient in crafting policy—original legislation which integrates Americans. Republicans must build much better grass roots organizations among these constituencies and allow legislative ideas to percolate from these to the very top. Also, Republicans have wholly neglected the field of building future leaders among women and minorities.

Minorities too must do their part to ensure that elected leaders are truly their representatives. They cannot be merely passive most of the year and grumble at election time. Greater efforts need to be made among minority leaders to build allies in both parties. This is the surest means of furthering the needs of constituent groups: minority leaders have to learn to let the parties compete for their vote. They, in imitation of other successful lobby groups, must be shrewder in the allocation of their resources and learn how to have a horse in both camps. Very little is gained by simply being beholden to one party. That is akin to a chaste woman pledging herself to a philanderer.

In a recent controversial speech, “Call to Renewal,” Barack Obama urged Democrats not to relinquish the language and ideals of religion to the Republican Party. He argued that Christianity and progressivism can be fused. Similarly, Republicans would do well not to relinquish the field of social integration to the Democrats. As Democrats and Republicans step on one another’s turf, patriots have cause to rejoice for this helps prevent the slide down a path of social degeneration and instead leads us towards one of integration, unity and national harmony.

On this Fourth of July, we can at least pledge to try.

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