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Is Demography Destiny?

Some media pundits see in the growing proportion of non-white groups in the population a growing opposition to the Republican Party that will sooner or later make it virtually impossible for Republicans to win presidential elections or even to control either house of Congress. But is demography destiny?

Conventional wisdom in the Republican establishment is that what the GOP needs to do, in order to win black votes or Hispanic votes, is to craft policies specifically targeting these groups. In other words, Republicans need to become more like Democrats.



Whether in a racial context or in other contexts, the supposed need for Republicans to become more like Democrats has long been a recurring theme of the moderate Republican establishment, going back more than half a century.

Yet the most successful Republican presidential candidate during that long period was a man who went completely counter to that conventional wisdom — namely, Ronald Reagan, who won back to back landslide election victories.

Meanwhile, moderate Republican presidential candidate after moderate Republican presidential candidate has gone down to defeat, even against Democratic presidential candidates who were unpopular (Harry Truman), previously unknown (Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton) or who had a terrible economic track record (Barack Obama).

None of this seems to have caused any second thoughts in the Republican establishment. So long as that remains the case, demography may indeed be destiny — and that destiny could be Democratic administrations as far out as the eye can see.

If non-white voters can only be gotten by pandering to them with goodies earmarked for them, then Republicans are doomed, even if they choose to go that route. Why should anyone who wants racially earmarked goodies vote for Republicans, when the Democrats already have a track record of delivering such goodies?

An alternative way to make inroads into the overwhelming majority of minority votes for Democrats would be for the Republicans to articulate a coherent case for their principles and the benefits that those principles offer to all Americans.

But the Republicans' greatest failure has been precisely their chronic failure to spell out their principles — and the track record of those principles — to either white or non-white voters.

Very few people know, for example, that the gap between black and white incomes narrowed during the Reagan administration and widened during the Obama administration. This was not because of Republican policies designed specifically for blacks, but because free market policies create an



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economy in which all people can improve their economic situation.

Conversely, few policies have had such a devastating effect on the job opportunities of minority youths as minimum wage laws, which are usually pushed by Democrats and opposed by Republicans. But these facts do not “speak for themselves.” Somebody has to cite the facts and take the trouble to show why unemployment among minority youths skyrocketed when minimum wage increases priced them out of jobs.

The loss of income from an entry-level job is only part of the loss sustained by minority young people. Work experience at even an entry-level job is a valuable asset, as a stepping stone to progressively higher level jobs. Moreover, nobody gains from having a huge number of idle youths hanging out on the streets, least of all minority communities.

Labor unions push minimum wage laws to insulate their members from the competition of younger workers, and Democratic politicians are heavily dependent on union support. For the same reason, Democrats have to go along with teachers’ unions that treat schools as places to guarantee their members jobs, rather than to provide the quality education so much needed to rise out of poverty.

What Democrats cannot say under these conditions is what Republicans are free to say — even if Republicans have seldom taken advantage of that freedom to make inroads into minority voting blocs. Inroads are all they need. If the black vote for Democrats falls to 70 percent, the Democrats are in deep trouble.

But if Republicans continue inarticulate, then it is they who are in big trouble. More important, so is the country.

Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305. His website is www.tsowell.com. To find out more about Thomas Sowell and read features by other Creators Syndicate columnists and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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