



Republicans and Blacks

Recently former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice added her voice to those who have long been urging the Republican Party to reach out to black voters. Not only is that long overdue, what is also long overdue is putting some time — and, above all, some serious thought — into how to go about doing it.

Too many Republicans seem to think that the way to “reach out” is to offer blacks and other minorities what the Democrats are offering them. Some have even suggested that the channels to use are organizations like the NAACP and black “leaders” like Jesse Jackson — that is, people tied irrevocably to the Democrats.

Voters who want what the Democrats offer can get it from the Democrats. Why should they vote for Republicans who act like make-believe Democrats?

Yet there are issues where Republicans have a big advantage over Democrats — if they will use that advantage. But an advantage that you don’t use might as well not exist.

The issue on which Democrats are most vulnerable, and have the least room to maneuver, is school choice. Democrats are heavily in hock to the teachers’ unions, who see public schools as places to guarantee jobs for teachers, regardless of what that means for the education of students.

There are some charter schools and private schools that have low-income minority youngsters equaling or exceeding national norms, despite the many ghetto public schools where most students are nowhere close to meeting those norms. Because teachers’ unions oppose charter schools, most Democrats oppose them, including black Democrats up to and including President Barack Obama.

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio’s recent cutback on funding for charter schools, and creating other obstacles for them, showed a calloused disregard for black youngsters, for whom a decent education is their one shot at a better life.

But did you hear any Republican say anything about it?

Minimum wage laws are another government-created disaster for minority young people.

Many people today would be surprised to learn that there were once years when the unemployment rate for black 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds was under 10 percent. But their unemployment rates have not been under 20 percent in more than half a century. In some years, their unemployment rate has been over 40 percent.

Why such great differences between earlier and later times? In the late 1940s, inflation had rendered



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meaningless the minimum wage set in 1938. Without that encumbrance, black teenagers found it a lot easier to get jobs than after the series of minimum wage escalations that began in the 1950s.

Young people need job experience, at least as much as they need a paycheck. And no neighborhood needs hordes of idle young men hanging around, getting into mischief, if not into crime.

Republicans have failed to explain why the minimum wage laws that Democrats support are counterproductive for blacks. Worse yet, during the 2012 election campaign Mitt Romney advocated indexing the minimum wage for inflation, which would not only guarantee its bad effects, but would put an end to discussing those bad effects.

Are issues like these going to switch the black vote as a whole over into the Republican column at the next election? Of course not. Nor will embracing the Democrats' racial agenda.

But, if Republicans can reduce the 90 percent of the black vote that goes to Democrats to 80 percent, that can be enough to swing a couple of close Congressional elections — as a start.

Even to achieve that, however, will require targeting those particular segments of the black population that are not irrevocably committed to the Democrats. Parents who want their children to get a decent education are one obvious example. But if Republicans aim a one-size-fits-all message at all blacks they will fail to connect with the particular people they have some chance of reaching.

First of all, Republicans will need to know what they are talking about. There are books like *Race and Economics* by Walter Williams, which show that many well-meaning government programs have been counterproductive for minorities. And there are people like Shelby Steele and the Thernstroms with valuable insights.

But first Republicans have got to want to learn, and to be willing to do some thinking, in order to get their message across.

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