

Al Sharpton's Message: Claim Your Destiny

One hundred and nine Bennett College students shook my hand and received their diplomas last Saturday. With big smiles and a little swagger, they went through the time-honored ceremonies of baccalaureate and commencement. And, we were blessed to have phenomenal friends join us. Rev. Al Sharpton was our baccalaureate speaker, and former Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman was our graduation speaker. Between the two of them they offered lessons for graduates all over the world.

Rev. Sharpton is an exceptional leader, brother and friend. He made lots of accommodations (including the taping his show) to get to Bennett on time. He was gracious, kind, and took pictures with all my folks. But most importantly, he brought an incredible message to the campus. He told our students to claim their crown, claim their destiny. He reminded them of the many ways that the rejected eventually prevail and asked them to claim their crown. Earning several minutes of standing applause, it is clear that Rev. Sharpton knocked it out of the park.

And then we had Secretary Herman whose down home humor and corporate knowledge combined to offer sage,



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

savvy, and humorous advice. She shared that a potential employer said the best job she could get was as a secretary, and she fulfilled his prediction by being Secretary of Labor for the United States.

Secretary Herman offered students valuable advice about navigating a sluggish labor market that only generated 115,000 jobs last month. More than 170,000 people withdrew

from the labor market because they are so discouraged that they think the jobs are not there. But my sister Alexis Herman didn't dwell on the negative, but encouraged students that despite tough and crazy economic times, each of us can make a difference when we are focused, committed, and forward thinking.

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dent to be positive and encouraged, to do their homework and prepare for interviews, to be focused and phenomenal. It is important to note that she is the woman the late icon Dorothy Irene Height laid hands on, a sister who brings us all together and encourages us all to make a difference.

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to clam their destiny, even in a tough economy. It's an interesting time. Young people are

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ate from college this month or in June. Not many will have the one-two punch of Rev. Al Sharpton and Alexis Herman. I am glad to have them as my friends. They are luminaries, and visionaries, folks who speak both ebonics and high phonics. They sowed into the lives of 109 Bennett women who have graduated, but they have also sowed into the life of our nation. I have been blessed to have them grace our campus.

The essence of the Sharpton/Herman message was powerful. Rev. Sharpton urged us to claim our crown, our dignity, and the array of our possibilities. The Honorable Alexis Herman reminded us that to win the game, we have to play it. Between them, they advised Bennett students

being kicked to the curb with the possibility that Pell grants will be further cut and interest rates may rise on student loans.

The bottom line is that this is a tough and challenging economy and there are opportunities. At Bennett there were two speakers who urged students to claim their crown, to never give up, despite the challenges of the economy. Their message hit home on our campus, but it also hit home in our nation and our world. Thank you, Rev. Al Sharpton and Hon. Alexis Herman for coming to Bennett and sharing your wisdom with our students.

Julianne Malveaux is president of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C.

'Black, Missing' In the GOP

As the Republican presidential campaign trail ensues, there is something obviously missing from GOP campaign activities and primaries—Black people.

A look at last month's GOP presidential primaries reveals that older Whites dominated the electorate.

According to an analysis by the National Journal, 89 percent of voters in Arizona were White, while Blacks represented just 1 percent. Meanwhile, Hispanics made up about 8 percent of the vote.

The findings are a stark increase compared to the numbers found in the same state during the 2008 general election. That year, 75 percent of voters were White, while 4 percent were Black and 16 percent were Hispanic.

A similar increase was shown in this year's Ohio primary. In the Buckeye state, a whopping 96 percent of voters were White, compared to 83 percent in the general election four years ago.

Aside from the primary elections, it is also apparent that Blacks are considerably absent from many GOP campaign activities.

While it is no secret that African Americans have long voted Democrat, the question at hand is whether the GOP is concerned with the obvious racial disconnect.

Michael Steele, former chairman of the Republican National Committee said in a recent interview with writer Kam Williams that there are a couple of things that the party can do to attract more African Ameri-

cans. "One is to own up to our own failures as a party, when it comes to making investments in the Black community when it counted, like the Civil Rights Movement," Steele said during the interview.

He explained that while Republicans had been the architects of landmark civil rights legislation during the Reconstruction Era, the party hesitated when it really mattered in the 1950s and '60s, resulting in a long-standing riff between the GOP and Blacks.

Steele added that Republicans should also, "Show up in the community prepared

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to have meaningful discussions about issues that actually matter to [Blacks] like job creation, in way that makes sense."

"That's why my very first official act as Chairman was to host a town hall meeting in Harlem. To me, that was a very important step to take," he said.

The National Black Republican Association (NBRA) has also continuously worked to close the gap. Their organization aims to return Blacks to their Republican roots and enlighten them on GOP ideals and values.

In the meantime, the AFRO wants to know if you spot more than one Black person at a GOP event. Email your submissions to Blackfolkspotted@afro.com.

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