

Black Voters: Ignored and Taken For Granted

What will it finally take for Black people to accept the fact that we have no real political clout? A little influence, yes, but no power. If our voting bloc were as strong as we like to think, the Republicans would not ignore us and the Democrats would not take us for granted. If we had real political power, both Mitt Romney and Barack Obama would have accepted the invitation by the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), NAACP, American Urban Radio Network, MSNBC-TV, and the Griot, to a debate at Lincoln University on October 9. But both candidates declined.

Yet, Romney did more than a half-hour and Obama did an hour on the Spanish-language TV network, Univision, both answering questions specifically related to Hispanics. Jewish people always get their audience with the candidates, and the gay groups never fail to get their face-time with the president – Romney won't have anything to do with them – but Black folks never get the same positive response when it comes to



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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being included in such events. Ever wonder why?

It is so obvious that Black folks are the last to be included, if not omitted altogether, in political discourse when it comes to debates, press conferences, and private meetings, that is, unless you are Jay-Z and his friends who are willing to bring \$40K to the table – \$50K if you want to hang with Romney.

Not that we learn anything new from political debates, as scripted as they have become. But it would be nice to have the candidates discuss specific Black issues every now and then. It would be great to see several, not just one, Black reporter asking both candidates questions relevant to Black people. You know, the way the

Hispanic and Jewish people do. So what does all of this mean? Is it that Blacks are willing to accept symbolism and platitudes over substance and pragmatism? Does it mean that we are willing to do the opposite of what MLK decried when he wrote the book, "Why We Can't Wait?" King opposed the gradualist approach to the work in which he was engaged, noting that Black people had been waiting for 300 years and could ill-afford to continue to keep waiting.

What King called the "fierce urgency of now" was his response to the waiting game being promoted by some of his critics during the early 1960s, but as Howard University's African American Resource Center Director, E. Ethelbert Miller, shared on NPR: "How long is now?" Miller reminded us that King's "I Have a Dream" speech was based on an economic premise, i.e. debt, a bounced check, and the "economic condition and problems in America." How true.

After all the speeches, the activism, and the deaths that took place in the 1960s, many Black folks are still saying, "Let's wait a bit longer." Many are oblivious to our lack of substantive political recognition and inclusion. They would rather stand on the outside and chant slogans instead of kicking in the door and insisting their

South, but by independent action." He went on to write, "Any people who would vote the same way for three generations without thereby obtaining results ought to be ignored and disenfranchised."

Malcolm X characterized the same principle in more colorful words. He said, "Any time you

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voices be heard and their issues be addressed.

It is a sad situation, but that's exactly what we deserve for going with the "wait" model.

Historian Carter G. Woodson wrote, "The Negro should endeavor to be a figure in politics, not a tool for the politicians. This higher role can be played not by parking all of the votes of a race on one side of the fence as both blacks and whites have done in the

throw your weight behind a political party that controls two thirds of the government, and that party can't keep the promise that it made to you during election time, and you are dumb enough to walk around continuing to identify yourself with that party, you're not only a chump, but you're a traitor to your race."

The University of Texas' Long History of Racism

The affirmative action program at the University of Texas now under review by the United States Supreme Court should not be looked at in isolation. As Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote in Grutter v. Bollinger, an affirmative action case involving the University of Michigan, "context matters when reviewing race-based governmental action under the Equal Protection Clause."

An amici curiae (friend-of-the-court) brief filed by the Advancement Project, an equal opportunity advocacy group, in support of the University of Texas provides excellent context of how the issue of race has played out in



THE CURRY REPORT

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egation of blacks to second-class citizenship. The litigation involved Dr. L.A. Nixon, a black physician in El Paso, Texas and a member of the Democratic Party. Dr. Nixon filed suit claiming he was unlawfully excluded from participating in the Democratic Party primary elections. The case made its way to the Supreme

from the University and from its graduate and professional schools."

In one of the most famous Supreme Court cases, Sweatt v. Painter, the court forced the University of Texas Law School to admit Herman Sweatt, a qualified

African-American who had graduated from Jack Yates High School in Houston and Wiley College.

"During Sweatt's first semester at the law school, a cross was burned on the law school grounds. Opponents of integration threatened Sweatt's life, in person and

by mail. Vandals defaced his home and threw rocks, shattering windows. Sweatt fell ill and struggled academically, financially, and personally. Life at UT became unbearable. Sweatt eventually dropped out of school—a 'physical and emotional wreck.'"

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Texas and the University of Texas for decades.

"UT is the progeny of a state that seceded from the Union in 1861 with the explicit goal of preserving 'negro slavery' for 'all future time,'" the brief observed. "Even after rejoining the Union and despite passage of the Reconstruction Amendments, Texas sought to implement its goal of excluding blacks from public life and political personhood. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Court repeatedly struck down Texas statutes designed to deny blacks full citizenship."

The brief noted, "Nixon v. Herndon, 273 U.S. 536 (1927), ranks among the many Texas-based cases that illustrate the state's rel-

Court, where Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, writing for a unanimous Court, held that Dr. Nixon's rights had been violated under the Fourteenth Amendment."

Despite the ruling, Texas refused to allow Dr. Nixon to participate in the political process. He appeared before the Supreme Court again five years later and got another ruling that forced Texas to comply.

Higher education was also subject to state-mandated segregation.

"Texas's flagship university was founded by white Texans for white Texans," the Advancement Project brief stated. "UT categorically barred black Americans

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