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# Opinion

## Does Any Presidential Candidate 'Deserve' the

**M**ichelle Alexander, the brilliant author of *The New Jim Crow*, writes in *The Nation* that Hillary Clinton does not “deserve” the Black vote.

She makes a strong case. She reminds us that the Bill Clinton administration yielded a draconian crime bill and welfare “deform” (I call it “deform” instead of reform because the Clinton changes made a bad system worse) that demonized poor women.

While Bill and Hillary Clinton are two different people, Alexander uses Hillary quotes to illustrate the ways she supported her husband’s policies.

Alexander is right to say that Hillary does not deserve the Black vote. She declines to endorse Bernie Sanders, though, describing him as “the lesser of two evils.” To his credit, says Alexander, Sanders opposed welfare deform and has been a far more vocal and aggressive critic of banks than Hillary. But Alexander says he still doesn’t “get it” around issues of racial justice, and notes that both he and Hillary supported the Iraq war.

I’m intrigued by the concept of “deserving” a vote. From my perspective, Bernie doesn’t deserve it, Hillary doesn’t deserve it — and none of the motley crew of Republican candidates deserve it.

No Democrat or Republican has ever deserved the Black vote.

The dictionary defines “deserve” as, “to do something or



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have or show qualities worthy of (reward or punishment).” To say someone “deserves” the Black vote suggests that someone is entitled to it or has a right to it. I don’t think any candidate has a right to the Black vote.

Frankly, with the possible

“No Democrat or Republican has ever deserved the Black vote

exception of Lyndon Johnson in 1964 (after the passage of the Civil Rights Act) and Rev. Jesse Jackson (after his history of activism) I don’t think any Democrat (or Republican) ever has, for that matter. What has either Hillary or Bernie done to “deserve” the Black vote?

No candidate should claim the sentimental right to the Black vote either, and I think in some ways that is what Hillary Clinton is attempting.

As Alexander correctly points out in her article, some African Americans are almost irrationally loyal to the Clintons. Many other African Americans, though, have a measured view of the Clinton years, celebrating historic appointments, like that of Alexis Herman as Secretary of

Labor, condemning the ways that Lani Guinier and Jocelyn Elders were abandoned by the Clintons, and balancing policy failures like welfare deform with some policy successes. On the other hand, Hillary Clinton’s standalone record includes a sensitivity to diversity that Sanders lacks. As a Senator and as Secretary of State, she had staffs that were very inclusive, with several African American women, in particular, serving in leadership roles in the State Department.

Her record shows that, as

him after a disappointing first term. African Americans, like others, must make demands of those who hold public office, or they are free to ignore us.

The challenge is that our two-party system too often fails to provide us with a satisfactory set of alternatives to the status quo. While I was disappointed with President Obama’s first term, I probably would have cut my hand off before voting for Mitt Romney. Similarly, as disappointing as Clinton’s welfare deform was, another Clinton term was far preferable to a Bob Dole presidency. We too often are faced with imperfect options, and with choosing the lesser of two evils.

Alexander addresses the flaws of the two-party system in her article, and talks about a “revolutionary movement” of people who believe that human rights and economic justice are attainable goals.

There won’t be a revolutionary movement before Nov. 7, 2016. So who deserves the Black vote? The candidate who works hardest for it. The candidate who addresses the Black community most directly and with the most relevance. The candidate who not only schedules very public meetings with Rev. Al Sharpton, but less-well covered meetings at a day care center, in a halfway house, in a hospital.

The Black vote should not be something a candidate deserves. It should be something a candidate earns!

President, she would continue her commitment to diversity and that we might finally have a cabinet that “looks like America.”

Does her commitment to diversity alone make her entitled to the Black vote?

The Black vote should be earned, not bequeathed. But too many African Americans seem to think that voting is the most — not the least — they can do.

We must vote for politicians based on their track record and also on their promises. But then we must hold them accountable so that they keep their promises.

We didn’t do it with Clinton in 1996 when we voted for him even after welfare deform. We didn’t do it with Obama in 2012, when we voted for

## Hillary and Bernie Re-Discover Black People

**O**ne thing is for sure: Black folks are enjoying this latest political mating dance with Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton.

Sanders is discovering Black people in South Carolina and Georgia, and Clinton has reopened the “leading Blacks” vault to rediscover their loyalty and willingness to present her to the Black electorate one mo’ time, y’all.

Sanders, after years without doing anything specific for the 1 percent Black population of his home state — much less for Black people in general — has now discovered (or rediscovered) his love and concern for us.

In the vast majority of cases it is really a case of Black people discovering Sanders, because most Blacks knew absolutely nothing about him prior to a few months ago, but for Ed Schultz and Black folks’ penchant for watching MSNBC. Sanders started out by traipsing up to Harlem, cameras in tow of course, to sip tea with Sharpton at a Black restaurant.



James Clingman

NNPA  
Columnist

Uncle Bernie then goes to MLK’s alma mater, Morehouse, and tells thousands of Black folks how much he loves them now and how much he will do for them—now.

“Meanwhile, Republicans have continued their strategy of ignoring Black people

It’s almost like he is waking up from his five-decade “I marched with MLK” respite and discovering he cannot win without the Black vote.

He is pulling out all the condescending platitudes to get the Black vote, and Black folks are lovin’ it.

Mama Hillary called on old standby, John Lewis, to tell

Black folks that Sanders has no street cred, because Lewis “never met him” back in the days of fire-hoses, dogs, and Billy clubs. (Maybe Lewis had a concussion back then and simply forgot.) Hillary then got members of the Black Caucus to endorse her, a monumental victory that will surely bring home the ultimate victory. After all, we cast between 93 and 95 percent of our precious votes for Barack in both elections, and he won.

Why not the same thing this year for Clinton?

Meanwhile, Republicans have continued their strategy of ignoring Black people by saying absolutely nothing on our behalf or in support of issues that specifically pertain to Black voters. But why should they? We are “all in” for the Dems.

One practical question to

ask candidates who are running around our neighborhoods, churches, and college campuses seeking our votes: “How much campaign money have you spent with Black-owned media, i.e. newspapers, radio?”

That’s just one of many acts of reciprocity and the bare minimum of what we should demand. If they do as the current POTUS did in 2012 — spend one-tenth of 1 percent with Black media — don’t support them until they increase that amount, and then move on to the next demand.

Stop allowing them to use and insult you, and stop slobbering over this latest discovery process.

Black people have been in this country since the show started.

*James Clingman is the nation’s most prolific writer on economic empowerment for Black people. His latest book, Black Dollars Matter! Teach your dollars how to make more sense, is available on his website, Blackonomics.com.*