

# FORUM

## Where are the black Republicans?



**Harry Alford**  
Guest Columnist

The times are quite different now. Gone are the days when the Chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC) would make deliberate outreach efforts within the Black community. Former chairs Jim Gilmore and Ken Mehlman would aggressively attend events, make speeches and order their staff to recruit aggressively.

It was RNC co-Chairwoman Pat Harrison who came to the 2000 National Black Chamber of Commerce annual convention and asked our participants to give the Republican Party a try. Former Chairman Ken Mehlman came to our annual event in 2005 along with Lt. Governor Michael Steele (Maryland) and Secretary of HUD Alphonso Jackson and demonstrated sincerity and inclusiveness. We were impressed and it made our political outlook "balanced."

Some of us were Democrats and some were Republicans. Most were actually undecided until election time. Now those who are Republican are keeping it quiet. It is not just because we have a dynamic African-American on the Democratic ticket but there appears to be a definite indifference shown by the RNC. You get the feeling that we aren't wanted anymore. As I write this, I cannot recall the name of the RNC Chairman as opposed to Gov. Howard Dean for the DNC. That says a lot.

In 2004, the RNC seated a record number of delegates at its Presidential Convention. This year they had the lowest Black representation in 40 years (according to Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies). In 2004, the convention had Black delegates that comprised



Steele

6.7 percent (167 delegates) of the total.

This year, that number was a dismal 1.5 percent (36 delegates) which equates to a 78.4 percent decline. By contrast, the Democratic National Convention had over 24 percent Black participation. There was a majority female population among the delegates, and Hispanics reached the 14 percent level.

Gays and Lesbians held a higher percentage of delegates at the DNC event than Blacks at the RNC event. The DNC was undoubtedly and proudly inclusive, and the RNC appeared to be very old school.

Yvonne R. Davis has this to say about the trend, "Since the 2000 and 2004 Republican conventions, a lot has changed for African-American Republicans. I was a vice chairwoman for Bush in Connecticut, a national co-chairwoman for African-Americans for Bush, a surrogate spokeswoman for the Republican National Committee and worked on Latino outreach efforts nationwide ... There were rainbow coalitions of interns and delegates. Featured speakers such as Colin Powell, J.C. Watts Jr., Condoleezza Rice, black actors and ministers and gospel singers played a role on prime-time television...I've gone from having VIP seats sitting in the Bush family box to having a premier seat on my liv-



Rice

ing room couch.... Real or perceived there was an effort to engage us." Things have certainly changed now.

A close friend of mine, who I won't expose right now, is a former "Eagle" in the Republican Party. That's a person who contributes at least \$50,000 per year to the party. This time around, he is quite active in the "Veterans for Obama Committee". He has done a complete turnaround and is actively recruiting Black Republican veterans.

Raynard Jackson, a long standing Black Republican advocate, has now started the "Black Republicans for Obama" movement. He is populating the Internet with his message and throwing it right up into the RNC's face. As though he is saying "You dis us; you will miss us".

Senator Obama's charisma and Senator Biden's statesmanship contrasted to that "pesky" Senator McCain and Gov. Sarah Palin who appears to be an "out-back nut case" replete with "Red Neck legacy" makes things rather noncompetitive in the Black community everywhere. The movement amongst Blacks all over the world is overwhelming. Prosper Adabla, an entrepreneur in Ghana, wrote me, "Hope you are well. My family and I cried uncontrollably for most of the speech period (Obama's acceptance speech).



Jackson

The only other time I cried so, was when S. Africa held its first election. We saw people, sick and able, grandmothers and parents, sinners and the saved, the oppressors and the enslaved standing in long procession, waiting to cast their votes, with the national black anthem echoing in the background."

This equates to the same moods I detect in France, England, Brazil, Spain, and throughout the rest of the world. The RNC is being viewed as the "oppressor" and the DNC as the "liberator".

How could the Republican Party let this happen, and to what success do they think it will lead?

I have polled close relatives of mine who are Republicans. The majority of them have recently officially changed their registration to Democrat or Independent. I haven't seen such a "sea of change" in my lifetime. It reminds me of the historical change that was led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Maybe next time, the RNC will return to inclusiveness and open up that "big tent" once again. Right now, I am finding more and more disappointment and hurt. Isn't this 2008?

Harry Alford is the co-founder, President/CEO, of the National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc. Website: [www.nationalbcc.org](http://www.nationalbcc.org).

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## Poverty: Beyond breaking news



**Dr. Julianne Malveaux**  
Guest Columnist

The political hoopla has obscured a critical new data release about poverty. As the respective political camps debated their agendas, there is evidence that people at the bottom of the economic spectrum are still scratching their way toward survival, and that, despite proclamations by President Bush and Republican candidate McCain that the US economy is strong, the real deal is that nothing has improved for the poor. The US Department of Census released data on August 26 that showed that one in eight Americans live in poverty. The numbers are larger for people of color, with one in four African American households experiencing poverty, and more than one in five (21 percent) of Hispanic households experiencing poverty. The differences are simply a function of income and household status. While White families had an average income

of \$54,000, African-American families had an average income of \$33,000, and Hispanic families had an average income of \$38,000.

Some cities had staggering poverty rates. In Detroit, for example, a third of the people are poor. Cleveland is another city with extremely high poverty. Invariably, the cities with high poverty are Black and Brown, old and young, and also industrially abandoned. When there are turnaround efforts, they are snagged up with the politics of race, class, and sometimes gentrification. Every number represents an urban tragedy, but the news cycle has not taken us past the numbers. The macro-economic story of poverty and joblessness is compelling, but the microeconomic story is heart-breaking.

I get emails daily from brothers and sisters trying to make it and finding survival a basic challenge. A woman wrote that she spent a year at an HBCU but cannot get a transcript because she has not paid her outstanding bill. She did not return to school because an aging parent required her care, and when the parent died, she lost any inheritance she might have hoped for because an older

sibling staked a better-documented claim. Family challenges left her homeless and she is looking for a chance to complete her education. She is a victim of family drama, but also of an economy that cannot embrace her, and a higher education system that will close doors unless she is properly financed.

She won't be properly financed in the current climate, yet this young, bright, focused black woman deserves a place at the educational and employment table. The higher education act does not have room for her - it barely has the dollars for minimally funded Pell grants.

To criticize this Higher Education Act, my colleagues say, is to bite the hand that feeds too many HBCUs. The fact is that our nation can only prevent poverty by investing in education, and heretofore, our investments have been scant and insufficient. The Census data would suggest that we have invested in health care. The number of people who lack health care has dropped by about a million, with 47 million lacking health insurance in 2006, and 45.7 million lacking health insurance in 2007. This may be described as commendable, but it may also be described as a

political sleight of hand: Because of changes in Medicare rules, a million or so more people, mostly children, get a break. But our health care system still fails to deliver for many working Americans. Our monthly data on employment and unemployment suggest that there is insufficient value for the workers whose efforts keep our economy alive. Health care is the tip of the iceberg, with data woefully insufficient because they fail to capture the burden some families take on when they simply try to pay their share of a health care premium or a co-payment. Unemployment is another part of the challenge families face, with too many being shrugged off so forcefully that they don't turn up in the data. Thus, in a period when economic growth has been robust, the poverty level has not dropped. This is the story that may have been swallowed in the middle of the political rhetoric. If poor people could organize, they would offer a compelling statement about the ways poverty data has been ignored in favor of so-called breaking news.

Noted economist Dr. Julianne Malveaux is president of Bennett College for Women.

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