



BlackEconomics.org

“Why Not a Black Political Party?”

by

Dr. Brooks B. Robinson

©**BlackEconomics.org**
P.O. Box 8848
Honolulu, HI 96830-8848
www.BlackEconomics.org
BlackEconomics@BlackEconomics.org

August 15, 2015

Overview

As Black Americans, which critical questions surface when considering political parties? As the 2016 presidential election approaches, the duopolistic political parties (the Republican and Democratic parties) promise to continue their domination of the political landscape. While the status quo is often considered to be efficient, one must wonder why a two-party system dominates and why there are not more political parties in the US? At bottom, what do political parties do? Moreover, a very important question that warrants a forthright answer is, why is there no Black political party? Despite our social fragmentation, we should ask: Given a 40-plus million population with well over 20 million eligible voters, why have Black Americans not organized ourselves into a political party that can leverage this sizeable voting bloc to obtain political, economic, and social benefits? In addition, given that we generally vote as a bloc and serve as a median vote, does not forming a Black political party appear as a very logical strategy? This essay explores answers to all of these questions, proposes a strategy for establishing a Black political party, and suggests that the time for moving forward on this strategy is now.

Introduction

This essay is about political parties. We begin with several important questions about political parties, the most important of which may be, “Why is there no Black political party?” Beyond the critical questions, we note two important realities about Black votes. We ask: “Why did earlier efforts to raise a Black political party fail?” In the end, it will take leadership to initiate efforts to organize a Black political party. Therefore, we inquire why notable and relatively wealthy Black Americans have not sought to solidify a legacy for themselves by seeking to raise a Black political party. We end the essay by highlighting what a Black political party may actually be able to accomplish, and we issue a call for this effort to be undertaken in the near term.

From our perspective, the formation of a Black political party is a logical objective that is already in place on a *de facto* basis with little-to-no benefits for the average Black Americans. It seems the right thing to do to formalize a Black political party so that average Black Americans can at least effect positive efforts to gain benefits through a tried and true political process.

Questions that baffle the mind

When a Black American begins to think seriously about political parties in the US, s/he usually gets around to the following two questions:

1. Why aren't there more political parties in the US—a nation that prides itself on democracy, which is supposed to be all about voice?
2. What do political parties do?

The first question is very baffling because so many of the world's democracies operate

with few-to-many political parties. The argument has long been that it is easier to get things done with just two parties as opposed to many. The recent history of grid-lock in the American political system calls this argument into question.

As a possible explanation for a two-party system, we surmise that two is a good number for those who want to employ the old tricknology that has worked to bamboozle and hoodwink the world for the last 6,000 years. It is an effective divide and conquer scheme. Moreover, when one accounts for the centrist stances that are often adopted in the end by political candidates, essentially, one ends up with a blending of the two political parties; i.e., one basic position on which the polity votes.

The second question is not so baffling, but it appears to be little understood. In the party of the US President and of the two houses of Congress, one has the forces that not only establish the nation's legislative agenda, but often, by default, its economic agenda as well. For Black Americans, who are at the bottom of the nation's economic ladder, it makes sense that we would be very interested in influencing the economic agenda and would, therefore, have a strong interest in influencing political outcomes through the political party process.

But there is a third question, which, given the foregoing, is most baffling:

3. Why isn't there a Black political party?

As already mentioned, it may very well be the goal of the most powerful in the country to restrict political parties to two to give the appearance of choice: A wolf and a fox. In the end, as Malcolm X pointed out, they are both members of the dog family. They have

shown historically that they have not had an inherent interest in the best outcomes for Black Americans. Every important legislative economic victory that Black Americans have won, and there have been only a few, have required considerable sacrifice on our part: Lives lost, physical injury, jail time, protest time, and a scar on our historical psyche. So efforts have always been afoot to thwart attempts to establish or maintain a “third” party—especially a Black political party.

Nevertheless, given a Black population of 40 plus million in 2015, and with over 25 million 18 years or older and eligible to vote, it seems reasonable that we would want to leverage this political power to obtain good for ourselves.¹ The answer to “why there is no Black political party” will come forth as we proceed.

Important and simple realities

The first simple reality comes out of research conducted by Black (1948). He is credited with having identified the underlying logic of the median vote theorem. It is an important theorem because it characterizes a very favorable outcome for Black Americans. In essence, when all votes are organized along a linear political spectrum, the vote that is at the median (half on one side and half on the other) is the one that carries the day—wins the election. In the US where the Democratic and Republic parties nearly split the total vote (including whites and other ethnic groups—excluding Blacks), the Black vote usually represents the median vote and, therefore, decides most major elections.²

¹ These statistics were derived from Colby and Ortman (2015) and File (2015).

² Of course Hispanics, another important ethnic group in the nation, can argue the same. When the total

Walton (1969) makes it abundantly clear that the two major parties and many third parties understood this situation very well. He points out that as early as 1843, the Liberty party appointed Negro delegates to high positions on various committees. The Free Soilers elected Frederick Douglass as Secretary of their 1852 political party convention. The Peoples’ or Populists’ party and the Progressive party sought actively and vigorously Black membership in the late 19th and early 20th century, respectively. The doctrinal parties (Socialist and Communist) parties found it important to their development to seek to attract Black membership. It goes without saying that the Republican and Democratic parties have mixed histories concerning their interest in securing Black membership. Nevertheless, when politically expedient, all of these parties resorted to efforts to attract the Black vote. Therefore, Black’s theorem was well understood long before he espoused it, and remains so today.

Given our advantageous position in the political strategic game, it makes sense that Black Americans would want to isolate ourselves to maintain our median voter position. One of the best ways to do this is to form our own political party, and to use that political party to leverage that median vote to secure the related benefits that can be secured.

The second simple reality is that Black Americans have essentially acted as our own political party historically. That is, Blacks have been nearly monolithic in our voting—either voting for the Republican Party, when it was the party of Lincoln and later for the Democratic Party, as the party of Roosevelt,

vote excluding Hispanics is split on a political issue, then Hispanics can claim a median vote position.

Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Clinton, and Obama. In other words, we vote mainly as a bloc, which is consistent with voting by political parties. For example, in 2012, 76% of Black Americans polled indicated that they were democrats; 5% said they were Republicans; 16% were Independent; and 3% were affiliated with other political parties or did not know their affiliations.³ When we form our own political party, voting as a bloc is likely to continue. The important change will be that we will have operationalized an organizational structure that can leverage more effectively the power of our voting bloc.

Forming a Black political party and voting as a bloc may seem anomalous in light of the nearly 50-year trend of the four-way disintegration of Black America.⁴ We believe that this trend is by design. However, we can design an effort to reverse the trend. Is it not logical that we look into the future and envision a path that is most favorable for us? Political strength is in numbers. Therefore, we should see the future benefit of leveraging our growing population and median voter status, and make a decision to form a Black political party that can produce the benefits that we desire.

Why earlier efforts to raise a long-standing Black political party failed?

Beginning in earnest in the early 1960s, Black political parties in their two varieties (parallel/satellite and independent parties) sprung up to give voice to Black Americans' fundamental rights and critical needs. Walton (1972) does a superb job of chronicling the rise and disappearance of these parties. They

focused mainly on local and state politics: e.g., the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP); the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO, also known as the Black Panther Party); and the National Democratic Party of Alabama (NDPA).⁵ Who can forget Fannie Lou Hamer's exploits at the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. However, probably the most instrumental personality in the rise of these political parties was Stokely Carmichael (aka Kwame Ture) who, *inter alia*, coined the phrase "Black Power" as part of his efforts to build support for Black political parties in Mississippi.

Moving forward to the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Black political parties with strong national interests surfaced. The most notable of these parties were the Peace and Freedom Party and the National Black Political Convention, which led to the formation of the National Black Political Assembly. While the latter was well-organized and attracted significant support (at least initially), only the former actually placed Black candidates on presidential ballots.⁶

Walton (1972) reveals that a lack of political maturity on the part of the parties' members prevented each of these Black political parties from achieving significant longevity. In combination, a failure to attract enough Black votes, the absence of sufficient financial support, internal conflicts and defections, and changing times (mainly integration of the American society including political parties) caused Black political parties to dissolve, align with other third

³See Pew Research Center (2012).

⁴See Robinson's (2010) analysis of the four primary Black American groups.

⁵The Black Panther Party mentioned here is different from the Black Panther Party for Self Defense that

was founded in 1966 in Oakland, California by Huey P. Newton.

⁶The Peace and Freedom Party placed Eldridge Cleaver and Ronald Daniels on presidential ballots in 1968 and 1992, respectively.

parties, or merge with the two major political parties.

It could be argued that the latter reasons is the most important contributor to the demise of Black political parties. It is true that all of these Black political parties had as a *raison d'être* opening doors to Black political participation in the nation. Once the nation began to soften on permitting Black participation in political affairs, the primary reason for the existence of Black political parties faded.

But, as always, things change as time elapses. In this case, Black Americans now have new strategic political, economic, and social interests and, therefore, have new reasons for forming a Black political party. Therefore the operative question is: "How do we raise one?"

Want to leave a legacy?

The difficulties that were experienced historically in raising and sustaining a Black political party should not disparage current-day leadership that is interested in optimizing political outcomes for Black Americans. In fact, it seems reasonable that selected relatively wealthy Black Americans who have dabbled in politics as important promoters of candidates should have a desire to solidify their legacies in this life by collaborating to raise a Black political party today.

Think of Oprah Winfrey, Richard Parsons, Kenneth Chenault, Russell Simmons, Jay-Z, and Beyoncé. Add in a few wealthy athletes such as LeBron James, Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and up-and-comers, such as Cam Newton and Russell Wilson. Together, they represent a solid base for gathering the finances and the wherewithal to start a process of raising a Black political party.

Add in Cathy Hughes, and we organize access to at least a couple of television networks and a radio network to use to publicize the effort. What greater legacy would one want to leave behind, which could (like the current Democratic and Republic Parties) stand for well over 150 years.

It is nearly impossible, today, to evolve the type of legacy that has been left to us by the likes of Paul Cuffee, Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, David Walker, Nathaniel Turner, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, or Martin Luther King, Jr. However, by making an effort to raise a Black political party, the aforementioned wealthy Black personalities of today could defy the status quo and strike a blow for securing rights and benefits for Black Americans.

We should not be confused that a Black Political Party can or should emerge in full bloom. We should recall that in 1854, today's Republican Party began with a gathering of a few committed activists in a one-room school house in Ripon, Wisconsin. Consider the party's power today. Similarly, a Black political party can grow, over time, into a powerful instrument, which can wrest from the political process in this country the types of benefits that we so richly deserve.

To achieve such growth, the Black American body *politique* cannot afford to sit and do nothing. If wealthy Black Americans light the political party fire, then every eligible Black American voter should keep the fire burning by being a card-carrying party member, and should reflect political maturity by contributing financially and politically to the party on an ongoing basis.

What can a Black political party do?

In short, the answer to this question is: “The same things that the two major political parties can do, but probably on a smaller scale.” After some thought, we arrived at four important objectives that a Black political party might achieve—at a minimum.

1. Create what Black America needs most: Operational jobs as well as jobs in the broader economy. In other words, a Black political party must have operational staff members across the nation. More importantly, assuming that the party is able to operate effectively, it should be able to influence social and economic policies in order to create continuously a significant supply of new jobs for Black Americans in the broader economy.
2. Linked to the first objective, a Black political party should be able to create leverage for Black Americans and enable us to obtain more of the benefits that we desire from the US political, economic, and social systems. Critical to this objective, a well-organized party should enable us to punish politically those who defect from the political strategy that we establish for ourselves.
3. Linked to the second objective, a Black political party should help us to assemble a structure that can facilitate the formulation and monitoring of a long-term, political, economic, and social strategic plan—something that have been sorely missing from our play in the national strategic game from the outset.
4. As an excellent side-benefit, a Black political party should enable us to

extend our knowledge concerning how to operate political systems in the event that we found a nation of our own at some point in the future.

If a Black political party satisfies all or most of these objectives, then it would have been well worth its creation. As already discussed, we have a history of creating political parties, and even managing major political parties in the US. For example, Ron Brown served as Chairman of the Democratic National Committee in the late 1980s and early 1990s and was instrumental in securing the presidency for Bill Clinton. More recently, Michael Steele served as Chairman of the Republican Party during 2009-2011. Consequently, achieving the aforementioned objectives should not be new territory. Rather, the creation and sustainment of a Black political party will mark the first time that we will fulfill these objectives strictly for ourselves as an important and significant player on America’s political stage.

In a political world where million-dollar donors and political action committees rule the day, only large actions influence outcomes significantly.⁷ A large action that Black Americans can implement to influence outcomes is to organize ourselves as a political party and to throw our political weight around as a sizeable voting bloc. Failure to adopt this approach may effectively limit considerably our voice in American politics despite possessing over 20 million eligible votes and serving as the median voter.

Now is the time

Too often in the market place of ideas concerning Black Americans those participating in the dialogue pose problems without

⁷ See Confessore, Cohen, and Yourish (2015) and Higgins (2015).

proposing solutions. In this case, the problem is that Black Americans are not benefiting politically as we should because we are not leveraging our median voter status. This essay proposes that we solve this problem, at least in part, by establishing a Black political party. The party would enable us to organize ourselves and establish a formal structure that should permit us to bargain with the powers that be—our votes in exchange for political, economic, and social benefits that we choose.

Of course, obtaining these forecasted results depends, in large measure, on the quality of our leadership. Organizing and sustaining a Black political party is no guarantee that these benefits will accrue. In other words, establishing a Black political party must be part of a broader indicator that we have achieved a certain degree of political maturity—including the ability to hold our leadership accountable.

It is our choice whether we take responsibility for making a Black political party a reality. Casual observation will tell us that other minority groups are leaning in this direction. If we and the broader nation stand by idly, we will find that not only have Hispanics formed their own political party, but that they will have also rewritten completely the political demographic landscape in the form of Latinoformia, New Latinico, Latinizonia, Latinexas, and Latinorida.⁸ We are already close to the point where we look up after two generations and find that another immigrant group has entered the US at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder and has found its way completely around us to a superior political, economic, and social position. If we are wise, then we will not allow this to occur, but will

form our own political party, and then leverage it to elevate our own position.

Time is moving on. The 2016 election is around the corner. Let us not let it pass without at least a serious discussion about forming a Black political party. Let us establish as a goal that 2020 should not come and go without the realization and operationalization of a Black political party. The time for action is now!

References

Black, Duncan (1948). "On the Rationale of Group Decision-making." *Journal of Political Economy*. Vol. 56, No. 1; pp. 23-34.

Colby, Sandra and Jennifer Ortman (2015). *Projections of the Size and Composition of the US Population: 2014 to 2060*. Current Populations Report PS25-1143. US Census Bureau. Washington, DC.

Confessore, Nicholas, Sarah Cohen, and Karen Yourish (2015). "Small Pool of Rich Donors Dominate Election Giving." *The New York Times*. August 1st. Accessed on August 5, 2015; <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/02/us/small-pool-of-rich-donors-dominates-election-giving.html? r=0>.

File, Thom (2015). "Who Votes? Congressional Elections and The American Electorate: 1978-2014." *Population Characteristics*, P20-577. US Census Bureau. Washington, DC.

Higgins, Tim (2015). "Million-Dollar Donations Fuel Super-PAC's New Dominance." *Bloomberg*. July 31st. Accessed on August 5,

⁸ It was recently announced in the press that Hispanics now exceed whites in the State of California (see Panzar 2015).

2015; <http://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2015-08-01/million-dollar-donations-fuel-super-pacs-new-dominance>.

Panzar, Javier (2015). "It's Official. Latinos Now Outnumber Whites in California." *Los Angeles Times*, July 8th. Accessed on July 19, 2015; <http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-census-latinos-20150708-story.html>.

Pew Research Center (2012). *A Closer Look at the Parties in 2012*. Washington, DC. Accessed on August 5, 2016; [http://www.people-](http://www.people-press.org/2012/08/23/a-closer-look-at-the-parties-in-2012/)

[press.org/2012/08/23/a-closer-look-at-the-parties-in-2012/](http://www.people-press.org/2012/08/23/a-closer-look-at-the-parties-in-2012/).

Robinson, Eugene (2010). *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America*. First Ancho Books. New York.

Walton, Jr., Hanes (1972). *Black Political Parties*." The Free Press. New York.

_____ (1969). *The Negro in Third Party Politics*. Dorrance & Company. Philadelphia.

BBR:08152015