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BLACKS AND THE RIGHT

By Dr. J. Clay Smith, Jr.\*

The movement to push Blacks to the political right has been in the works for sometime. It began at least as early as 1972 under the sponsorship of the Institute for Contemporary Studies (a conservative "think-thank" sponsored by Ronald Reagan, who was then Govenor of California). The planning to realign the Black vote to more conservative ideals, may have had a positive objective. After all, in 1972 Ronald Reagan and Company had witnessed over twelve (12) years of racial turmoil, and the further realignment of the Black vote to the Democratic Party. Surely, for Republicans there had to be an alternative offered to Blacks to balance what appeared to be a lopsided political choice for Black Americans -- the Democratic Party.

In December, 1980, at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, a group of over 100 participants, mostly but not all of whom were Black, and all of whom were Republicans, met at the invitation of Dr. Thomas Sowell and Dr. Henry Lucas, Jr. They met under the sponsorship of the Institute for Contemporary Studies.

The 1980 meeting at the Fairmont Hotel was a conference designed to test and draft the blueprints for political action as it relates to Blacks being implemented today in cooperation with the right wing concepts of the Republican Party. Depending on your perspective, one can say that Black Americans

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\*Before the Newsmarkers Breakfast of University Relations of Howard University, at the Armour J. Blackburn Center, March 27, 1985, Dr. Smith is a Professor of Law at Howard University, and former Commissioner of the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

are fortunate that Black conservative Republicans are involved in this so-called "ideological realignment" of the nation, or one can say that the Black conservatives are making a lot of noise, have few followers and are threatening the advances made in the past decade of their group.

In broad terms, Black America is involved in a realignment of how government should be managed. This is critical since the political perspective of the Republican Party is bottomed on economic rule -- an outgrowth of laissez faire. The consequence of economic rule (that is, let the market place govern) over legislative and judicial choice (let Congress and the courts aid in refereeing the marketplace) has caused uphevel not only in the Black community, but the white community is well. The message to Blacks -- often spoken through the mouths of some identifiable Black Republicans, and other business minded Blacks -- is to "cast down your bucket where you are" and accept and accommodate a plan of economic and political action which will leave you with something.

A significant part of the 'cast down your bucket' theme -- growing out of the 1980 Fairmont Meeting -- was to alter and to create doubt in existing Black leadership. In point of fact, it is the position of the right that no political realignment is possible in the post Roosevelt years -- without a frontal attack on not only Black leaders, and the Black institutions that specific leaders represent. The attack is being waged against moderate Black Republican leaders as well as liberal Blacks in both parties. Regretfully, the political advertisement is to sell the right and not to buy Black votes.

This approach is a mistake because it will take Black votes to elect Republicans in future elections.

The political plan offered by the right to Black America is simply stated: Take the right or suffer the consequences -- even if and when by choosing the right, it is to the detriment of the Black community, its aspirations and immediate gains.

With the popular reelection of Ronald Reagan, the hard tones of this offer have hardened at every level of the executive branch of government as well as through the acid tongue of Clarence Pendleton, Chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. It is my view that Chairman Pendleton, has exceeded the bounds of his public charge by baiting Black leaders to fight him in public, thereby shifting the debate of racial equality to racial neutrality in the nation's eyes. For surely, debates on race between Blacks is not a debate at all.

Pendleton is aided in this quest to neutralize the "Negro problem" by Clarence Thomas, Chairman of the EEOC, and by other Black members of the Administration, who claim that it is better to remain silent and have access to the President and his men than to speak, and to lose influence.

There is, however, a flaw in the strategy of the Black right, especially those in government because they are failing to a large extent to penetrate the rank and file of Black America. Hence, there is no major movement towards the Republican Party. Why?

The main reason for the slow progress to win Black Republican converts is that history has a protective grip on the Black race that cannot

Clarence Pendleton's recent hearings on set asides gained national attention, it is important to note that the "New America" theme has penetrated to the decisionmaking process of some Administrative Law Judges, and assuredly to regulatory commissions. Fortunately, there still exist public servants of all political persuasions who believe that this nation is governed by the rule of law and not solely economic principles. Republicans, drawn to the party by economic beliefs, may face betrayal in coming years by the elimination of the Small Business Administration, and "colorblind words" leading to the erosion of the presence of Black businesses in the free market place of economics and ideals.

The issue facing America today is, does it see what is happening to it? The Reagan policy -- spawn on a noble ideal of free enterprise -- is caught in a snag of "counter-discrimination."

- (A) The president's economic policies are causing fewer Blacks and whites to choose college as an alternative to a better life. Such a policy is antithetical to the core of Black aspirations. Education and liberty are synonymous in the Black community.
- (B) The president's refusal to support key job training programs to increase a productive work force from among the citizens in long range terms is inconsistent with the free enterprise system. It is predictable that at least some of the participants in these training programs will aid businesses to profit in our economy.

- (C) The refusal by the Justice Department to enforce and to set aside existing judicial consent decrees in Title VII decisions is likely to resegment numerous job classifications in both the government and the private sectors.
- (D) The refusal by the Department of Justice to consider busing to remedy segregated intercity schools as a result of "white flight" will maintain or resegment public education in a number of cities in America at great costs to Black America, and to many American communities.
- (E) The advocacy of the Department of Justice to shift the law requiring proof of "specific intent" to prove individual discrimination and to displace the "effects tests" of group discrimination will leave in tact at least two generations amounting to millions of existing Black Americans who have suffered discrimination in America.

Hence, the so-called colorblind policy advanced by the right is nothing more than "counter-discrimination," the maintenance of existing forms of discrimination.

In closing, Black Republicans are few in number, but their voices need not be inaudible on questions of historic principle which has guided our group. It may be that the press does not consider voices other than those on the right to be newsworthy. Little attention has been paid to moderate Black Republicans by the press. Many moderate Black Republicans have opted

opted to ride out the tide with the hope that others will speak for the historical conscience commonly shared. The problem with this reliance is that all who can speak must speak.

Whatever Black Republicans are doing, we'd better take stock of the future and guide our party and our president back towards a middle ground or lose our voice to the pied pipers, who have no recognizable following in the Black community.