

MINORITY JUXTAPOSITIONS

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The rights of minority communities are an essential element of the political vernacular as a consequence of the contemporary civil rights era. Segregation, racism, discrimination and a plethora of legal and statutory restraints directed against African Americans were some of the corner stone issues that fueled the civil rights movement. Various civil rights legislative and statutory victories generated great optimism and expectations among many Black Americans which perhaps reached a high point in the mid 1970's. In particular the proliferation of African American elected officials in county, city and state legislatures coupled with congressional electoral victories raised the hopes in the Black community to believe political and economic empowerment was achievable in the foreseeable future.

The success of direct social and political action tactics in the form of sit-ins, marches, demonstrations and protests yielded results that made the American dream accessible to African Americans. Specifically, affirmative action legislation, in the areas of education, housing and employment reinforced the general perception among many (Blacks & whites) that equal access under the law would eventually be the rule, as opposed to the exception in the future America. Racial discrimination and segregation, the fundamental political, economic and social paradigm of American society and institutions, seemed to be in transition in the wake of the civil and equal rights advances. The victorious and celebrated civil rights coalition crusaded the virtues of "racial integration" among the "races" (black & white), and Black became beautiful among the heretofore Negro community.

Racial integration, equal rights and affirmative action became political buzz words of the civil rights coalition and evolved into the general political lexicon. The coalition generated an African American political leadership as a practical component of the broad-based coalition of liberals and "progressive" whites. Popularly referred to as the "legitimate African American civil rights leadership" Black political leaders have articulated

the political and legislative policy concepts as defined by the liberal and progressive white leadership. To a large extent the terms, conditions, battleground and re-mediation associated with the civil rights struggles were defined and interpreted by liberals and progressive whites.

There has been a long standing concern among the grassroots and hip hop generation leadership that the African American political leadership is virtually hand picked by white paternal political and economic masters. The notion that the current African American leadership is inherited from the civil rights period on one hand and on the other hand is appointed and anointed is a popular point of view at the grassroots community level. In relation to the long-standing issues such as police brutality and racial profiling for example, there is more often than not a dichotomy between the legitimate civil rights leadership, including elected officials, and the grassroots community leadership.

The political rhetoric and reality of discrimination against Black Americans appeared to be in decline as the result of the prospect of legislative affirmative action. As a practical matter the victories of the civil rights movement that advanced the cause of equality and justice for African Americans in particular, were compromised and eclipsed by the rights of "minorities." The concepts of racial preferences to re-mediate historical discrimination against African Americans enjoyed a brief 15 minutes of fame. Hence, the concept of racial preferences was redefined and positioned as "racial quotas" which sounded the death knell for racial equality on behalf on African Americans by affirmative action initiatives. Therefore other political minorities apart from the Black community were and continue to be the primary beneficiaries of the anti discriminatory affirmative action legislation.

At this point the legitimate African American civil rights leadership advocates on behalf of the rights of minorities while categorically obscuring the past racial discrimination against Black Americans and the need for targeted redress. The paternal political masters successfully introduced the notion of "reverse discrimination" against whites, which had a chilling effect on the political, economic and

social advancement of the Black community in general. On the contrary, family members and partisan constituents of the African American political elite have enjoyed affirmative access to opportunities associated with affirmative action along with women, gays, Asians, Hispanics and other minorities.

Results of the US Census in the year 2000 has introduced an interesting juxtaposition in the minorities based political paradigm. A political drama is being staged in the context of competing minorities, vis-à-vis, Black and Hispanic Americans. The bottom line of the US Census revelation and presentation suggests that the Black and Hispanic community are in a virtual dead heat in the context of the most numerous minority in America. The political caveat is that Hispanics are the most prolific in terms of the fastest growing of all the American minorities. Some among the grassroots African American community suggest that the much hyped Black and Hispanic juxtaposition is a political ruse with nefarious implications. Nevertheless, the African American civil rights leadership is parroting the juxtaposition, which minimizes the Black community as a diminishing minority in a mosaic of other minorities. Accordingly, when speaking on behalf of equity and justice for the Black community specifically, African American political leaders run the risk of being accused of racism and or racial separation.

The ventriloquism of the paternal political masters relative to the African American leadership has apparently over ridden or excised the memory of the Black political leaders regarding American history. The fact remains that neither the Hispanic American community nor other minorities experienced the ravages of pre-civil war slavery or the degradation of pre-civil rights segregation and racial discrimination. The experience of the various minority communities in American history is well documented. However, the experience of the African American community in American history is in deed unique unto itself.

Political juxtapositions of American minority communities are the sophisticated manipulation of power relationships and power potential in the electoral process. The objective of the juxtapositions is to maintain the political status quo

and is achieved by packaging and interpreting social data. In some instances the data are disseminated broadly and in other instances the data is an esoteric resource. The 400 years of socializing the African American community may have in fact generated a minority psychological complex among American Blacks. On the other hand African Caribbean's and immigrants from continental Africa and parts of South America have no concept of being a racial minority in their respective countries of origin. While during the civil war and following World War II, African Americans constituted the vast majority of Black Americans, recent immigration trends have rendered the African American community as a minority among a minority of Blacks in America. In addition to the increased immigration level of Blacks to America from a broad range of countries, another factor that has quickened the rate of attrition among the African American community is the sustained and pervasive poverty, social policy and the impact of drug sub-culture on the African American family.

The emerging demographic in the Black community represents the spectrum of the African Diaspora. As a consequence of the demographic transition there is an ongoing debate within the Black community relative to the appropriate term to be used for self-description. Since the transition from the imposed term of Negro to Black, various arguments have been advanced within the community regarding the application of the various terms such as, Black, African American, African Caribbean, Continental African, African South American and Central American. The debate centers around new immigrants to America from the African Diaspora who are alienated by the term African American as it negate their respective country of origin and stereo-types them. Although the debate is still ongoing and various individual preferences abound, there is general consensus that the term Black is an umbrella term that covers the Diaspora in total.

Despite the perspective of the Black community relative to self descriptive terms, political juxtapositions continue to be imposed, promoted and advanced by the majority community and their surrogates. The most recent political juxtaposition between Blacks and Hispanics was not unexpected as it represents a classic Machiavellian maneuver.

Interestingly enough whether one considers his or herself as Black or Hispanic as per the US Census, it is inconsequential. What is of great consequence is how one is viewed and defined by the “majority” community. It is the perspective of the majority community and the institutions thereof that determine who and what you are and how you will be dealt with. Therefore, whether you consider yourself Black or Hispanic is perhaps a psychological question designed to generate a kind of political intelligence.

It is obvious to many that some Blacks are Hispanic and some Hispanics are in fact Black. The difference between Blacks and Hispanics are ethnic and cultural and not racial. Regardless to how the political juxtaposition is hyped, there remains an essential political congruency between the two “minority” communities. In New York for example there is a Black and Hispanic caucus in the city council and the state legislature as well as a liaison on the community based level. On one hand, the Black and Hispanic “minority” juxtaposition is consistently hyped by external political interests, and on the other hand, the Black and Hispanic political leadership, elected and community based promote “minority” unity in the context of the minority political coalition. While the “minority” coalition may be politically correct, the political reality is that the political empowerment of the Black community is undermined and compromised by the generic minority focus on the part of the civil rights political leadership.

The similarities between the Black and Hispanic community are apparent in terms of general issues, but the specific needs for political, economic and social empowerment of the respective community are fundamentally divergent. In addition, the comparative state of political and economic power between the communities is at variance and each faces different challenges. Specifically, the Black political leadership must develop a strategy to attract the emerging immigrant population that is increasingly diverse and unresponsive to the traditional political rhetoric associated with the civil rights leadership. As a matter of fact, the conventional African American political wisdom is already being challenged in any number of significant ways. It is well documented that the African American political leadership elite

precariously remains in place by virtue of a constricted political electorate and a low level of voter participation in the political process in general and the primary elections in particular.

Despite the diminishing political returns, the African America civil rights leadership continues on automatic pilot, apparently unconcerned about the emerging demographic dynamic and the cathartic process underway. Quit the contrary, the civil rights political leadership is patting itself on the back as the result of the 90 plus percent electoral plurality it delivered to the Gore \ Lieberman campaign. Only the civil rights leadership, “progressive” whites and political neophytes suggest that the monolithic and one dimensional application of the voting franchise was a politically astute and sophisticated development. It is our observation and assessment that the silent majority in the Black community that did not vote are disillusioned and apathetic as the result of poor and unresponsive leadership. Apparently, the silent majority of Black citizens concur with the electoral strategy of the previous Clinton administration, and the Gore \ Lieberman campaign that the African American and “progressive” white coalition can no longer win elections.

Perhaps a case in point is the politics of New York for example. Although New York has a majority “minority “ electorate and the Democratic Party disproportionately out number Republicans at the rate of about five to one respectively, there is a Republican Governor and Mayor. Governor George Pataki and Mayor Rudy Giuliani won two terms to office in spite of the overwhelming odds. Even with the numerical disadvantage the Republican candidates were able to successfully exploit the political weaknesses and liabilities within the “minority” coalition in general and the African American community in particular. As a matter of political candor the African American community may very well be the weakest among the “minority” communities despite its large numbers.

Elected officials of all stripes both Democrat and Republican are speaking out very publicly regarding their effort to attract Hispanic voters. The mass media are also touting the Hispanic community as the critical mass that will determine the victory or defeat of future electoral hopefuls in both political parties. The not too subliminal seduction of

Hispanic voters seems to underscore the political juxtaposition between the greatest two American minority communities. Beyond the emotion and sensationalism generated by this finding and political presentation, there is much speculation in various quarters as to the origin and objective of the minority juxtaposition. Some in the Black community are suggesting that the juxtaposition is a ruse to set up a political rivalry between Blacks and Hispanics that may ultimately minimize if not neutralize Black political power particularly. To a large extent the perspective of American political history is testimony to the xenophobic paranoia and emotion that continues to energize and motivate the political and electoral process.

Fortunately, the African American civil rights leadership has not engaged the contrived minority juxtaposition. However, the civil rights leadership continues to advocate on behalf of all minorities as they tenaciously cling to their front line political position. On the other side of the political aisle, the Republican Party and elected officials are advancing a major blitz in order to attract the "Hispanic vote" specifically, while continuing to give lip service at best to reaching out to the African American vote. Some in the Republican Party conveniently suggest that the Black community has an organic and emotional connection to the Democrat Party. The fact remains that the Republican Party has not reached out to get the Black vote in any substantive way in recent political history. As a practical matter some Republican Party elected officials have made strange bed-fellows with prominent Black Democratic political leaders. On the other hand Black Republican community leaders tend to get ignored or placated by sophisticated political scenarios.

The Republican Party's recent victories in New York, vis-à-vis, Governor George Pataki, and Mayor Rudy Giuliani, speak volumes, in the context of strange political bed-fellows. Both the Governor and the Mayor have developed political relations with their favorite Democratic leader. Specifically, Rev. Calvin Butts, and the Rev. Floyd Flake respectively are the recipients of largess from the Republican Party despite their strong allegiance to the Democrat Party. The flirtation that Republican Party officials maintain with Black Democrats also occurs at the county leadership level, particularly in

New York City, effectively marginalizes the local Black GOP leadership and neutralize Republican electoral candidates. It is no accident that there is no Black Republican candidates to compete for elective office in New York City. Heretofore, the Republican Party has not demonstrated a serious interest in political investment banking in New York City.

Politically correct lip service on the part of both political parties obscures political truths and advances a sophisticated and esoteric agenda. The term "minority" has been positioned as a political buzz word that continues to service remote political interests that reside in both political parties. The hard ball and complexity of the political and electoral process may have escaped the sensibilities of the civil rights leadership. The notion of political friends and enemies as articulated and promoted by the African American political leadership is misguided, sophomoric and does not serve the interests of the Black community at large. The notion of political friends and enemies is social and emotional in nature and has no real-time political significance. Politics in general and electoral politics in particular must be based on the interests of the community, and how the community's interests can be leveraged by manipulating the political process. The emerging political leadership in the Black community seems to have a practical if not realistic application of the political process.