

Why Are Blacks Democrats?

The fate of Karen Whitsett, a black Democratic representative to the Michigan House of Representatives, [who was censured](#) by her fellow black Democrats from Detroit, for developing good relations with President Trump, speaks volumes. It tells us, if any further proof were required, how deeply American blacks hate the Republican Party and any black person who does not share this loathing completely.

Although Ben Carson may be the famous success story produced by a poor black family in Detroit, this distinguished surgeon and cabinet official was denied the privilege of having a school in his old neighborhood named after him. Carson's sin is having served in a Republican administration.

In 2014, Tim Scott became the first black Senator from South Carolina since Reconstruction. But since Scott was a Republican, he won only 10 percent of the black vote in his state, while carrying 88 percent of the white vote. After Scott's victory, South Carolina black Democratic Congressman James Clyburn [immediately denounced](#) him as a race traitor who was against "the interests and aspirations of 95 percent of blacks." In an optimistic moment, Scott predicted that Trump would increase his share of the black vote in this year's election by 50 percent.

That share, according to Scott, would rise from 9 percent to 14 percent; and this was to be considered a vindication for a Republican president who (before COVID-19 hit) had improved the job prospects of blacks more than any other president, including his black Democratic predecessor Barack Obama. *The Hill* reports that an "overwhelming majority of blacks will vote for any Democrat against Trump" and put black hostility against Trump at 85 percent, which is actually saying the same thing as Scott, albeit in a less positive way.

The black vote normally goes at a rate of 90 percent or more to Democratic candidates for any office. Not even Obama won a significantly higher percentage of the black vote than other Democratic presidential candidates. Although Obama turned out black voters in higher numbers in his presidential bid than John Kerry or Al Gore, he won the black vote against his Republican opponent by only a few points more than other recent Democratic presidential candidates.

In 2008, three black Republican candidates, including the Pittsburgh Steelers legend Lynn Swann, lost their races for the governorship, with the black vote going heavily against them. If Swann had won, he would have been the first black governor of Pennsylvania. But black voters turned against their onetime sports hero because of his Republican affiliation. Apparently voting for Swann or another highly qualified black Republican gubernatorial candidate running that year, Kenneth Blackwell in Ohio, was not deemed a racial breakthrough. The problem in both cases was the black politician belonged to a national party that blacks abhor.

The intensity of this hatred has remained for me a mystery. I still recall a black girlfriend of my daughter at the University of Michigan who went into a rage because the school had dared to invite as a speaker President George H.W. Bush. This friend considered this unsettling invitation to be an act of disrespect against her race. Curiously, the same black student was a fundamentalist Christian and fierce opponent of abortion, yet she ritualistically voted for the Democrats because she considered the Republicans a living reproach against blacks.

I won't go into the usual GOP song and dance about all the civil rights legislation that the Republicans supported at a higher percentage than Democrats or that Republicans had once freed black slaves. What is hard for me to figure out is why this hatred has developed and grown more intense over time.

The idea that I used to hear from academic colleagues, that blacks became Democrats because the Republican Party allied itself with segregationists in the 1960s, is totally false. [Blacks switched parties in 1936](#), when they voted 76 percent for FDR. In 1932, blacks still voted in even larger numbers for Hoover.

Well into the 1960s, both Southern blacks and white segregationists were Democrats, but when Southern whites began moving into the GOP, blacks stayed with the Democratic Party. Blacks stayed there even after Republicans sponsored and supported civil rights laws. The only Republican presidential candidate whom blacks voted for in respectable numbers since 1936 was Eisenhower in 1952, when the Democratic ticket featured a [strong segregationist, John Sparkman of Alabama](#), as vice-presidential candidate. That year a Republican candidate, who was the Allied war commander in World War II, won 37 percent of the black vote nationwide.

I believe it is less the case that blacks hate Republicans because they are loyal Democrats than that they are Democrats because they loathe Republicans. Black leaders who are allied with the Democrats will accuse Republicans of nasty racist intentions and find willing black listeners, whom they can drive to the polls by attacking Republicans as anti-black. Strangely enough, most black voters, as [Red State correctly points out](#), identify themselves as conservative or moderate. Black voters almost always support in primaries the presidential candidates of the Democratic National Committee leadership and their own Democratic leaders. Their choice of Biden this year was no exception; their preference for Barack Obama over Hillary Clinton in 2008 was.

In recent years, black Democrats James Clyburn, John Lewis, Elijah Cummings, and Maxine Waters have complained that the Republicans insist on voter identification in order to keep blacks from the polls. Whether this charge is correct (and it may be), it is hard to blame Republicans for wanting to limit

black turnout on election day. Despite their almost unanimous endorsement of civil rights legislation and dutiful support for every extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Republicans, particularly black Republicans, turn off black voters.

This dislike of Republicans may now be part of American black ethnic identity. The GOP may have to deal with this likely possibility and give up shedding crocodile tears over “black victims” of Democratic politicians in inner cities. That message seems incapable of convincing its intended audience.

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