

Beyond the Southern Strategy? An Analysis of Rand Paul's Speech at Howard University

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Critical Problem: Republican Party's Performance in 2012

93% of African Americans supported Obama, and Republicans lost 71% of the vote from Hispanics and 53% of the vote from women voters (Bommarito, 2012)

Barriers Paul Faced

Gaffe on Rachel Maddow Show: Maddow questioned Paul on his ideology and the Civil Rights Act, asking, "Do you think that a private business has the right to say we don't serve black people?" Paul responded, "Yes. I'm not in favor of any discrimination of any form" (Weigel, 2010, paras. 17-18).

Southern Strategy: "The more Negroes who register as Democrats in the South, the sooner the Negrophobe whites will quit the Democrats and become Republicans. That's where the votes are" (para. 7).

Audience's slant to Democrats: "The influence of Democratic Party identification is still a very powerful cue for black voters" (Kidd, Diggs, Farooq, & Murray, 2004, p.174).

Paul's Strategies

Acknowledgement of Barriers: "My hope is that you will hear me out that you will see me for who I am, not the caricature sometimes presented by political opponents..." (para, 18).

Recrafting the Conservative Civil Rights Narrative: "The story of emancipation, voting rights and citizenship, from Fredrick Douglas until the modern civil rights era, is in fact the history of the Republican Party" (para. 41). Thus, the Republican Party was the agent that empowered African Americans to achieve emancipation for their movement.

Application of Republican Ideology: "If you are struggling to get ahead, if you have school loans and personal debt, you should choose a political party that wants to leave more money in the private sector so you get a job when the time comes" (para. 78).



Reaction

- Dana Milbank (2013): "Howzat? As a candidate in 2010, Paul questioned the constitutionality of the Civil Rights Act's Title II, which prohibits private discrimination"
- Gabriel Rodriguez (2013) wrote, "The response to Paul's speech was mixed, with some appreciative of his remarks and others grateful that he had made an effort to come out" (para.7).
- Leonard Pitts (2013) claimed Republicans need "to provide much-needed leadership on issues urgent to African-American voters in the here and now. For instance, mass incarceration, the failed drug war, the achievement gap and job discrimination" (para. 16).

Implications

- Paul's speech was unsuccessful in appealing to the African American audience.
- The strategy of retelling and appropriating the narratives of African Americans is a huge risk for white, conservative, communicators.
- Republicans need policies that support African Americans, such as lowering sentencing for first time offenders, policies that ensure equal opportunity for all ethnicities, as well as supporting bills that ensure the education system isn't plagued with discrimination.