

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Did we really dodge a bullet?

The contentious census. That's an apt title for the decennial "head count" of Americans used to partition congressional power among the states.

While Republicans and Democrats in the nation's capitol argue over the best way to do the enumeration — statistical sampling, which is theorized to yield better numbers by not undercounting minorities, or actual head counts, which some say impossible — a local battle is brewing over the census. More precisely, redistricting.

The County Commission, which rarely divides among partisan lines, voted 4-3 in March to approve redrawing commission district boundaries before the U.S. Census in 2000. Commissioners in April approved \$30,000 to bring the reapportionment to fruition.

Now comes news that some commissioners expect the cost of redistricting to top \$100,000 and think the process should wait until after the 2000 census in order to produce a more accurate head count. The issue is stalled for now. Should we breathe a sigh of relief?

Vocal throughout the debate over redistricting has been North Las Vegas Senator Joe Neal. He says redrawing boundaries would dilute the ability of ethnic minorities to elect one of their own, thus weakening them politically.

Neal and others prefer to back the constitutionally-prescribed census, which would lead to redistricting in 2001 for the 2002 election and is considered the most accurate method because it attempts to take an actual head count.

Commission Chairwoman Yvonne Atkinson Gates, who is black and represents largely minority regions of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas, opposes redistricting. Her district, the smallest of the seven with 125,087 people, hasn't experienced the explosive growth of southwest and northwest districts.

Atkinson Gates benefits more than any commissioner should the redistricting effort falter. She recently announced she will run for re-election.

This brings up another point. Are we that much better off with a black face on the commission — or any regulatory body for that matter — if that person doesn't advance our interests?

While it's logical for minorities to support efforts ensuring their interests are represented in government, is a black face the best conduit to produce those results?

Is a choice between the lesser of two evils: The self-serving minority politician whose "successes" are attributable primarily to circumstance and chance or the "other" politician who has never championed our cause but has thrown crumbs our way?

While we at the Sentinel-Voice are ardent supporters of black representation — as well as the best representation — by our elected officials and we oppose efforts to siphon off the voter power blacks have gained through years of strife, we question whether or not ensuring that a candidate who looks like us get elected every time to represent us is always wise.



Why Republicans can easily win more Black votes

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

With the gloomy prospect of more political carnage in 2000, many Republicans claim that they will reach out to Black voters.

But, they probably won't because they believe that Blacks are inherently Democrats, liberals, and downtrodden. These are gigantic myths.

For the first three decades of this century Blacks were loyal Republicans. That changed during the Depression because Democratic candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised jobs and relief. As president he delivered. Republican President Hoover didn't. But, even then, Blacks didn't totally abandon the Republicans.

In 1956, Republican President Dwight Eisenhower sent the first civil rights bill since Reconstruction to Congress. That was the same year Ike grabbed 40 percent of the Black vote to win re-election. In 1960, Nixon also received a sizable percentage of the Black vote against Kennedy.

The Democrats got the Black vote back in 1964 when Lyndon Johnson made good on his civil rights pledge, and Republican candidate Barry Goldwater's states' rights platform sent a strong message that Blacks weren't wanted in the party.

Blacks got the same negative signal from Nixon in 1968, and 1972, and

Reagan and Bush in the 1980s.

Despite the three-decade long cold shoulder Republicans have given Blacks, many never completely closed their door to them.

Republican Colin Powell never gave a thought to making a bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1996, or running as an independent candidate. Polls taken during the presidential campaign showed that 25 to 45 percent of Blacks called themselves conservative. If Republican leaders had made any kind of overture to Blacks in the 1990s, the number of Blacks who would have rushed to them would have caused their ranks to swell.

Even when they didn't budge from their hard ball stand on affirmative action, social programs, tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy, and the total elimination of welfare, many Blacks still backed the Republican party.

In 1994, 23 Black Republicans ran for Congress; two Black Republicans won state-wide offices in Colorado and Ohio; six White Republican governors won office with significant Black votes and one Black state representative switched from the Democrats to the Republicans, claiming that the Republicans were closer to her constituents' views on social issues than the Democrats.

This was a tip off that

Blacks are not the hard line liberals they have been made out to be.

A 1996 poll by the Joint Center for Political and Educational Studies, a liberal Black think tank, found that the overwhelming majority of Blacks favor stiffer sentences for drug use, violent crimes and three strike laws. A near majority also support the death penalty, and school vouchers. Other polls showed that the majority of Blacks backed welfare reform legislation in 1996 as a way to end dependency and encourage personal initiative.

In exit polls taken after the Nov. 3 election more Blacks than Whites said that they were better off financially than a year ago. Some political experts immediately chalked this up to the general mood of prosperity fostered by Clinton. But this attitude of economic well-being has less to do with loyalty to Clinton than the prospering of the Black middle-class during the

last two decades.

By 1994, 40 percent of Black high school graduates were attending college; 64 percent of Blacks owned homes and 27.2 percent of Black families earned more than \$25,000 annually.

In 1997, Black Enterprise magazine reported that the top 100 Black businesses had nearly \$14 billion in sales. Although, the wealth of the new Black bourgeoisie still pales aside that of their White counterparts, the fact is that thousands of African-Americans are coming closer than ever to realizing the American Dream.

The day that Republican leaders snatch the political and ideological blinders from their eyes and change the perception that their party is something more than a cozy, good ole White boys' club, they will find that many Blacks would love nothing better than to join it.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is the author of "The Crisis in Black and Black."

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