

Youth

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and often seeks the votes of others, is not surprised by the influence of adults on young people.

"The Black young people understand that their future in times to come is tied up with the Democratic Party. They know it from the elders. They know it from their visible spokespersons... That message is passed down. There's a history there."

Lewis knows what it means to be politically active as a youth.

At the age of 23, he was the youngest speaker at the March on Washington in 1963. A year later, he attended his first Democratic national convention.

He maintains close ties to the youth.

"On last Saturday night, I spoke to more than a thousand young African-American Democrats from colleges around the country at the Kennedy School of Government over here at Harvard. And they had all been trained to organize and turn out the vote," he said last week in an interview.

Some dread-locked or braided, some jean-clad, some corporate-looking in suits, ties and pumps, they came to the Boston convention with a clear focus and a strong sense of choice.

"Young people are sometimes affiliated with the party of their parents, but what we're seeing, I think, is young people being open to critically accepting each party and third parties as well," says Jeffrey Johnson, former national youth director of the NAACP and now vice president of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, headed by Russell Simmons.

He notes that an associate that is a president of a college NAACP chapter, will be speaking at the Republican National convention in New York.

The Rev. Conrad Tillard, who was known as Minister Conrad Muhammad when he was a member of the Nation of Islam, has spent years organizing Black youth.

"Democrats appear clear that they want people with divergent views," says Tillard, pastor of the Eliot Church of Roxbury.

"Republicans on the other hand, only want Black people that have a certain political outlook. Those who are largely conservative, largely conformists and rather mute on issues that African-Americans feel are important. Until

the Republicans are able to produce or embrace independent Black Republicans, they will never be able to get Black American youths because they are the most independent-minded of our race."

University of Pennsylvania Professor Michael Eric Dyson agrees.

"They can't get their mothers and fathers, they can't get the children as well," explains Dyson. "Stylistically, the Republican Party has alienated so many young Black people because it doesn't pay attention to the

needs, wants and desires of those people, doesn't put forth the money for the programs to support their getting out of ghettos, slums and barrios."

A report by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies said the GOP should have made more inroads after Black youth.

"On a significant number of important public policy issues, a sizable proportion of this younger generation — between one-third and two-thirds — are sympathetic to Republican positions," the

report states.

"Despite the compatibility between the GOP's positions in several of these areas and the views of many young African-Americans, the overwhelmingly conservative and southern White nature of the national Republican Party ensures that when young Blacks vote, they remain firmly in the Democratic column."

The report titled, "Blacks and the 2004 Democratic Convention," further explains, "Only 50 to 60 percent of 18-to-25-year-old

African-Americans identified with the Democrats (in polling since election 2000)," the report states.

"Yet this diminished identification with the Democratic Party has not translated into increased Black support for the Republican Party."

There are a variety of factors that cause youth to choose one party over the other, says Harvard Law School professor Charles Ogletree.

"Russell Simmons, the Rev. Al Sharpton and many of the stars of television and the screen and celebrity ath-

letes have deliberately talked to young people about how important this election is and which party will serve their interest," Ogletree says.

"It's also issues. They know the difference between an administration that opposes affirmative action and one that enforces it, the difference in an administration that tolerates racial profiling and one that will prevent it and the difference between an administration that believes in health care for everyone and others that give lip service to it."



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