

Civil Rights

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Democrats yet Democrats weren't the first ones to make a Black person National Security Advisor. They weren't the first to put someone at the State Department. They weren't the first ones to do any of these things. That's why Republicans are smarter than they are."

And Berry says publicly what many Blacks will only admit privately.

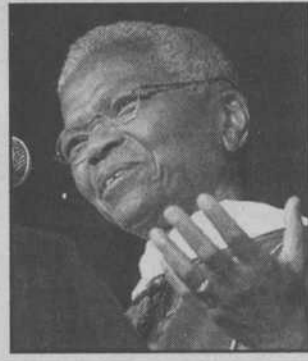
"You have to beg the Democrats to do anything," she says. "Even when you look at Clinton, who was the most powerful Black person on the White House staff? The chief of staff wasn't Black. Neither was the deputy chief of staff. The National Security Advisor wasn't. The domestic policy adviser wasn't. None of the key people that he had over there were Black. He didn't have anybody in any job of major substance. And that was Clinton. The Republicans come in and they can easily find Black people who think just like them. They put them over there and everything is fine."

John Kerry was considered more liberal than Clinton yet he was no better, Berry says.

"Think about the Kerry campaign and how they wouldn't even listen to Black people and all the trouble people had to get him to even say 'boo.' All that loyalty hasn't meant anything and now they're talking about running even farther to the right."

"I don't mind it being said that I battled presidents, the most important thing is what I was battling with them about."

— Mary Frances Berry, Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights



If Democrats move to the right, that would be a mistake, Berry says. And they are already making enough tactical mistakes without adding to their woes.

"Democrats and progressives are too undisciplined," she explains. "Nobody wants to be disciplined. Everybody has their own idea — that's part of the ethos of what they do. Republicans will behave in a disciplined manner. When the message is (whatever), all of their publications will be in sync that week; all of their talk radio programs, and anybody who gets up to say anything, anywhere, is going to give you the same message."

Berry knows that with her departure, a majority on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights are Republicans who oppose affirmative action. The NAACP is searching for a president to replace Kweisi Mfume, whose resignation is effective Jan. 1. And she accuses the National Urban League of being a minor player in civil rights.

"Even when Hugh [Price] was there, they were corporate, but they weren't miss-

ing in action. They would show up," Berry recalls. "They're just not showing up anymore — unless the White House asks them to."

Berry bemoans a lack of street protests.

"The reason there is no agitation among Blacks — I don't see any — is because the symbolism is such that you could tell yourself — until something happens to you — that nothing is wrong. You could say, 'Look at Colin Powell. Blacks are everywhere. We can just do anything.' Our people don't draw a distinction between what people are doing."

Berry recalls listening to a gospel radio station recently when a Black woman called

in to discuss Condoleezza Rice.

"She said, 'We all know that what she's saying is wrong, but at least she's up there.' That's the world we live in."

But that's not Berry's world. "One time, one of my Right-wing critics asked, 'How come every time somebody does something that you think is wrong, you have to fight them?'" Berry smiled broadly before answering the question with a question: "Well, what are you supposed to do when somebody does

something wrong?"

Berry often jogs in sweatshirt given to her by the Women's Studies Department at the University of Michigan that reads: "Well behaved women rarely make history."

A pensive Mary Frances Berry says, "I think that's right. I've never been accused of being well behaved."

"I am what is known as an outlaw; they call it a racial outlaw in culture studies. It never occurred to me to do what people will think won't cause any trouble."

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CBC

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"We'll be reaching out to the Republican and Democratic leadership in the House and the Republican and Democratic leadership in the Senate."

Watt expressed hope that freshman Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), one of four new members of the CBC, will be helpful on the Senate side. Obama's election makes him only the fourth African-American to serve in the Senate since Reconstruction.

"I think we'll be able to mobilize the Senate in ways that we have not been able to since we had a member of the Senate as a member of the Caucus," Watt says.

The new CBC members, to be sworn in Jan. 4, are: Obama, Gwendolynne Moore of Wisconsin, Al Green of Texas, and Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri.

Watt says the now 43-member Caucus will also reach out to community groups. "I think it's our responsibility to work with, provide ideas or support to other organizations who are working on similar agendas, such as state legislators, civil rights groups, faith organizations, ministers, fraternities and sororities," Watt says.

But first, the Caucus itself must pull together, he says.

"The first issue that I'm dealing with is trying to coalesce the Black Caucus around a set of issues. We want a collective agenda. That's important to our effectiveness," he says. "If we are voting together, if we are acting together, if we are supporting each other, it is a tremendous force."