

OUR VOICE

Man of Steel?

Michael Steele, if only you were a man of steel. When the Republican National Committee elected you as its chairman, we tried hard not to believe this was a purely political move, a desperate Hail Mary by the Republican Party to match the election of the first African-American president of the United States, Barack Obama, a Democrat from Illinois. We tried hard not to believe it because the euphoria of Obama's overwhelming victory on Nov. 4 seemed to signal a new day and a new way forward in America and in American politics. We tried to be optimistic about having two Black men leading the country's major political parties.

For your part, Mr. Steele, you started out well, promising — no doubt to the chagrin of the largely White, mostly Southern, ultra conservative base of the geographically and politically dwindling Republican Party — to remake the GOP, infusing it with hip-hop sensibilities and broadening its coalitions to be more representative of the American tapestry. Some in your party may not have liked or even understood your use of terms like "bling bling." Others may not have come to terms with you, a Black man, being their face and their voice... And, despite the resentment, your election as RNC chairman has fueled in corners of the conservative movement, you managed to retain some measure of authenticity, by speaking to conservatives and minorities in terms each group understands.

Mr. Steele, you provided hope, even if only a glint of it, in the possibility of the Republican Party becoming a proverbial big tent, under which all ideas from people of all walks of life are welcome, no one being put down for his or her ideological leanings, skin color, sexual orientation, patriotism (or lack thereof) or any other historic wedge issue. Then, in one fell swoop, you erased all that hope. You kowtowed. You failed to man up. That's something hip-hop can't respect.

If you're unfamiliar with what we're talking about, here's a quick refresher: Over the weekend, Steele appeared on CNN's "D.L. Hughley Breaks the News," an hour-long show mixing politics, comedy and social commentary. During an interview, Hughley posited that talk show host Rush Limbaugh was the de facto head of the Republican Party, a claim many people, be they liberal, conservative or independent, probably agree with. Steele immediately said that, no, he's the titular head of the party and that Limbaugh, who has a following in the millions, is an entertainer who says things that, at times, are "incendiary" and "ugly." And Steele was 100 percent correct. Limbaugh has riled people for nearly two decades with comments that are sexist, dismissive of the disabled and downright mean. He said that he hopes President Obama fails, only backing off the statement and rephrasing it — he wants his policies to fail — after drawing heat for personally attacking our commander in chief.

According to an MSNBC report, it took Steele all of 51 minutes to issue an apology. Fifty-one minutes. That's faster than any of the handful of other politicians who've criticized Limbaugh, only to have Limbaugh spank them on the air and coerce them into a groveling, sniveling apology. Steele should be ashamed of himself. He had nothing to apologize for. He doesn't answer to Limbaugh. He answers to all Republicans, not just the faction of Limbaugh supporters.

By saying sorry, he allowed himself to be politically emasculated. After all, he's the one who has to fundraise for the GOP, to help lead it back from oblivion, to find the right candidates to take on Democrats, to build (or draft) a credible candidate in 2012.

All Limbaugh has to do is yap and get paid. By yielding to Limbaugh, Mr. Steele, you look weak, Sambo-ish, Uncle Tom-like. Your capitulation recalls a bygone era where Black men were wrong even if they were right and were never better than White man, no matter how great their personal achievements. It would've been bold, hip-hop-like, to refuse to bow down to Limbaugh, refuse to compromise your principles.

But you didn't. You blew a great chance to begin fashioning a new GOP, one that's inclusive and broad-based. Mr. Steele, courage has proven to be your kryptonite.



Hope for state of Black union

By Gary L. Flowers
Special to Sentinel-Voice

As is the fiscal state of the American Union, The State of the Black Union is economically bad, but not hopeless. The adage holds true that when America gets a cold Black America gets pneumonia. Yet, through the sick times, Black people have joy, resilience, and intellectual integrity.

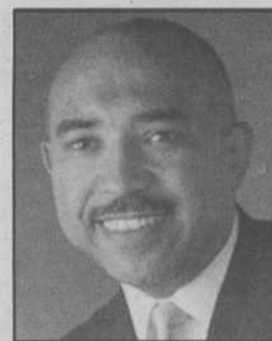
In the main, African-Americans have dealt with determination decades of "depressions."

Last week, Tavis Smiley hosted the 10th Anniversary of the State of the Black Union (SOBU), a national discussion by academics, activists, and are tests of issues impacting Black America.

The collective conversation has elevated Black issues to the American consciousness. Some may say there are no "Black" issues but rather "American" issues. Not true.

Issues of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — or the lack thereof — are, in many ways, singular to African-Americans, due to our unique history in the United States of America.

For example, Black people remain in the worst or most vulnerable position in healthcare, education, criminal justice, employment, and asset ownership. As the



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SOBU discussion developed, several voices rose above the others in terms of clarity, brilliance, preparedness, and effectiveness.

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr., president and founder of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, and reigning "heavyweight champion" of articulating the political policy issues affecting Black people, analyzed the current economic crisis by saying, "If American banks are given governmental loans at 3 percent and sell the money to American students at 6 percent, they are engaging in 'scalping student loans.'"

Rev. Jackson called for "one set of rules" on the playing field of economic recovery.

Rev. Jackson's prized pupil, Rev. Al Sharpton, in issues impacting African-Americans, poignantly pointed out that for Black people who erroneously conclude their success in life was predicated on individual

merit rather than results of the American Civil Rights Movement, he said, "You may have been responsible for building an impressive resume, but it was the Civil Right Movement that forced an employer to read your resume."

As the discussion turned to today's hip hop culture and their responsibility to lead, Tricia Rose, professor of African studies at Brown University stated, "Hip hop voices often refer to themselves as 'original gangstas' when in reality they — like many of their Black American ancestors — were 'original commodities.'"

She went on to challenge hip hop artists to promote constructive images and not destructive ones. Professor Rose cited her book, Black

Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America.

Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League, and chairman of the Black Leadership Forum, deposited the pragmatism and vigilance of monitoring how money included in the economic stimulus legislation presented and passed by President Obama would be spent, relative to Black people.

He encouraged African-Americans to read the legislation (he has read 900 of the 1400 pages) and challenge mayors, governors, and Congressional members to equitably distribute developmental dollars.

Morial, a former mayor informed the audience that the Black Leadership Forum
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