

**The
BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

June 12, 2008 - Issue 281

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here



Is in a very tight squeeze financially

We know this is not a good time for anyone when it comes to money. If you can please spare as little as \$10 it will play an important part in getting through our current money crisis. Thank you very much.

[Click here to become a BC paid Subscriber](#)
or
[Make a contribution of any amount you choose.](#)

[Home](#)

**Republicans Would Chisel the Anger Out of Dr. King's Face
Color of Law**

By David A. Love, JD

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

It is true that the dead are unable to defend their reputation. Such is the case with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. With four decades since his assassination, it is very easy for society to lose sight of the man's philosophy and his great works. Just to take this a step further, there is a not-so-subtle attempt by conservatives to recast Dr. King either as a mild-mannered and milquetoast individual, obsequious and not easily roused, or as a conservative who, if alive today, would side with the interests he railed against in the 1950s and 1960s.

One example of these efforts is the controversy surrounding the King memorial. Chinese sculptor Lei Yixing has been commissioned to render a [28-foot sculpture of King](#), carved from Chinese granite, the cornerstone of the \$100 million King memorial in Washington, DC.

Frankly, [Lei's proposed likeness of King](#) is a bad piece of work, bad meaning good. King stands erect, back not bent, with a stern face and his arms crossed.

But the [United States Commission of Fine Arts](#), which must give final approval of every facet of the memorial, said in a letter that the statue made Dr. King look "confrontational," that "the colossal scale and Social Realist style of the proposed sculpture recalls a genre of political sculpture that has recently been pulled down in other countries." The Commission, a federal body that supposedly provides "expert advice" on issues of design and aesthetics in the nation's capital, "consists of seven 'well qualified judges of the fine arts' who are appointed by the President [in this case, that would be Bush] and serve for a term of four years."

How deviously ironic that the Commission would show concern that a sculpture of King is too confrontational, too political, too angry. King was a man who confronted the three-headed beast of racism, economic exploitation, and militarism, from the unjust laws of Jim Crow segregation, to the White clergy in Birmingham who told him to wait, to the injustice faced by Memphis sanitation workers, to the atrocities of the Vietnam War, and was hunted by the government and gunned down in the process. Let us remember that J. Edgar Hoover called King "the most dangerous man in America, and a moral degenerate."

Understandably, the artist is aggravated the Commission has asked him to alter King's appearance (a depiction they initially voted for unanimously) so that he doesn't seem to have so much on his mind.

Meanwhile, the [National Black Republican Association \(NBRA\)](#) has kicked off a campaign to place billboards across the country that read "Martin Luther King Jr. was a REPUBLICAN." [One such billboard](#) was placed off exit 145 of I-26 in Orangeburg, South Carolina. According to Frances Rice, who founded the NBRA in 2005, the association "is dedicated to promoting the traditional values of the black community which are in concert with the core Republican Party philosophy of strong families, personal responsibility, quality education and equal opportunities for all." Further, according to Rice, "Our vision is to help black Americans become power players in the political arena and move into our ownership society, emphasizing small business and home ownership."

The problem with the NBRA's argument regarding King is that it is intellectually disingenuous and lacking in historical context. You get the sense that there are people operating the controls, the Republican National Committee perhaps, who hope you don't see them behind the curtain. On its website, the NBRA states that "It should come as no surprise that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Republican. In that era, almost all black Americans were Republicans. Why? From its founding in 1854 as the anti-slavery party until today, the Republican Party has championed freedom and civil rights for blacks."

Proclaiming that King was a Republican is not so outlandish. Frederick Douglass was a Republican, as were the 22 Black members of Congress (two senators, including Blanch Kelso Bruce of Mississippi, a former slave, and 20 representatives, including John R. Lynch, who was speaker of the Mississippi House before coming to Washington) and one Black governor (Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback of

Louisiana) who served during Reconstruction. The Republican Party also claimed Black lieutenant governors, a secretary of state, judges, state treasurers, superintendents of education, mayors and generals of state militias.

The Radical Republicans who were responsible for the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, the Freedmen's Bureau, and other post-Civil War legislation, represented a brief glorious period for the Republican Party, but that was a long time ago. The party of Lincoln is not the party of the Bush-Cheney-Rove criminal enterprise. And in the twentieth century, the Republican Party that had a vibrant and viable liberal wing in the form of Sen. Jacob Javits and Mayor John Lindsay of New York, of Sen. Edward Brooke of Massachusetts and Arthur Fletcher, the "father of affirmative action," is no more, and has not existed for some time. With no diversity on the national scene, the GOP can offer up only a paltry few prominent faces of color these days, token faces such as Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, an Indian American.

To be sure, the Democrats must answer for their long history of racism, and even today, the 2008 presidential primaries revealed the problem of racial division that won't go away. The NBRA likes to argue that "the Democrat Party is as it always has been, the party of the four S's: Slavery, Secession, Segregation and now Socialism." But this analysis suffers from historical amnesia.

In its narrative, the NBRA conveniently omits the role of the GOP's Southern Strategy in steering White segregationists from the Democratic Party to the Republicans, and winning elections by appealing to White fears of African Americans. It started with Nixon, following Johnson's passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act, which ensured a massive loss of White Southern support for the Democrats. And the Southern Strategy was perfected by Reagan, who kicked off his presidential campaign by invoking states' rights in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where three civil rights workers, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner and James Chaney - two Jews and a Black - were murdered by domestic terrorists in 1964.

As the now-deceased Republican strategist Lee Atwater said in 1981, "You start out in 1954 by saying, 'Nigger, nigger, nigger. By 1968, you can't say 'nigger' - that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things, and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites."

The Southern Strategy has had a long run in American politics, and it may very well fail miserably in the midst of an Obama candidacy. And yet, this is the last idea the Republicans have left, aside from permanent war, tax cuts, and ending abortion and gay marriage.

The Republican brand, badly damaged, would be taken off the shelves if it were pet food. In this season of discontent, Americans are in dire straits and the economy is ready to jump off the deep end. Foreclosures and food stamps abound. It would seem that eight years of Republican rule have ruined the nation so badly that more parlor tricks, more bait and switch, more smoke and mirrors will not work this time.

McCain, the GOP standard bearer, has the unenviable task of attempting to distance himself from the most unpopular president in American history, a president whose policies are in line with his own. His party, like America's two-party system as a whole, is a dinosaur. And it faces well-deserved extinction by clinging to anti-immigrant fervor at a time of changing demographics; anti-Muslim sentiment when the U.S. needs to reach out to the rest of the world; robber baron economics which is exacerbating the gap between rich and poor; the elimination of civil liberties ostensibly to make us free, and an unjust and immoral war in Iraq which is bankrupting the nation and sucking the life out of essential social programs.

Uninspiring, stiff and crotchety, McCain is, according to David Letterman, "the guy at the hardware store who makes the keys." Unable to energize even his own base, McCain faces predictions that as many as [40 percent of evangelicals](#) will support Obama in the general election. With a 50-state strategy and a massive voter registration drive, the Obama train hopes to change the electoral map and make it rain blue in the red states.

So, in light of this, the NBRA hopes for a McCain victory by siphoning off 25 percent of the Black vote in the 2008 election. A quixotic endeavor at best, such a feat would not have been possible even when the Democrats ran boring wooden candidates for president every four years. Their plan for achieving this - not unlike the conservatives who would eliminate affirmative action on the grounds that King wanted a "colorblind" society - is cynically to portray Dr. King as someone who had much in common with today's atrociously regressive and bigoted Republican Party. Moreover, McCain voted against the King national holiday.

Like Bush's art critics, expert lackeys who would use a chisel to remove all the anger from Dr. King's face, it simply won't work.


BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, David A. Love, JD, is a lawyer and journalist based in Philadelphia, and a contributor to the [Progressive Media Project](#), [McClatchy-Tribune News Service](#), [In These Times](#) and [Philadelphia Independent Media Center](#). He contributed to the book, [States of Confinement: Policing, Detention, and Prisons](#) (St. Martin's Press, 2000). Love is a former Amnesty International UK spokesperson, organized the first national police brutality conference as a staff member with the Center for Constitutional Rights, and served as a law clerk to two Black federal judges. His blog is [davidalove.com](#). Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Love.

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here

[Home](#)

Click Here To

CONTRIBUTE TO  NOW

Click Here To

CONTACT 

Your comments are always welcome.

e-Mail re-print notice

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002 - 2008
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved