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**Michael Steele's Impossible Mission
Left Margin**

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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Richard Parsons is called upon to take the helm at distressed Citigroup and Barack Obama assumes leadership of the United States. I have to admit I've had moments of misgivings about all this. I would prefer that African Americans rise to authority and responsibility over things that are doing well rather than faltering but, hey, a challenge is a challenge. On the other hand I can't summon up any empathy for Michael Steele. Trying to rescue the Republican party while it sinks in a morass of scandal and historical irrelevancy is a task I wouldn't wish on anyone.

Whenever I mention to a friend that I'm going to write down some thoughts about the GOP, the response is always: why? Oh, everyone knows that the party remains powerful and that it can gum up the works in Washington and state capitals like Sacramento and Charleston. But who cares about the party's fate? I don't. If I had my way there would be three parties: the Republicans, Obama's Democrats and a good sized one to its left to which I could belong. I've a few Republican friends and they do care, but find being in a party being overtaken by Sarah Palin and Rush Limbaugh is excruciating.

After his recent speech to the NAACP, Steele said he had felt welcome at the convention and appealed to black people to give his party "a chance."

"I appreciate that skepticism, I understand it, I know where it comes from, I know why it's there," he told *CBS*. "There's history on both sides here. There's history that talks about how the party was there to empower and free African-Americans to really access this great country. And then there's history there where the party walked away from the civil rights agenda in many respects for African-Americans in the '60s

"So my job now is to be the bridge...to sort of bring us to a new place."

"President Obama and his Congressional allies have shown America their true agenda,"

Steele said in a recent letter to his party's "base." "They are leftist radicals bent on transforming our constitutional republic into a socialist 'utopia' by dismantling the free enterprise system, eroding the rule of law, imperiling our national security and curtailing our freedom." Of course, he knows none of that is true. Actually, it's the kind of lying talk he once tried to dissuade the party from using. But Steele's not calling tune and I doubt he's even writing the lyrics.

"A groundswell of popular grassroots opposition to the Obama Democrats' unprincipled power grab and failed policies is rising across America," Steele's letter went on. Actually there is a grassroots groundswell brewing – in the GOP against him. Back in May, *Washington Post* writer Dana Milbank reported that "Steele had promised to reach 'urban-suburban hip-hop settings' as part of his 'off the hook' party-building effort, but party officials moved to give the chairman the hook: They called this week's special meeting of the party and were considering a no-confidence vote when Steele, trying to prevent a mutiny, agreed to have some of his spending powers stripped."

Steele doesn't seem to be able to make up his mind whether he wants to follow a principled political course or the one the rightwing has chosen. In December, When he was running for RNC chair he told *Essence* magazine, "as I have been telling members of the party, no matter how much we disagree, we must respect the office and the man or woman who's in it. I hope that courtesy is extended in a way where it shows how much Republicans want to see this president succeed. If a president fails, then we all fail." Evidently, the party leadership didn't get the message, nor did he take it to heart himself. This past Monday at a Washington press conference, he attacked the President's healthcare reform proposal as "socialism" and, as the *Associated Press* put it, to "question Obama's truthfulness."

Michael Steele seems like he is sincere in his desire to lure African Americans to the Republican ranks. But he has a funny way of going about it. Over the weekend of July 12-14 he appeared at the national convention of the Young Republicans in Indianapolis. There, in an on camera interview, he explained how he would attract black voters. "My plan is to say, 'Ya'll come!' I got the fried chicken and potato salad."

Oh, and about that Young Republican convention. It elected Audra Shay as the group's new chair even after it came out that the *Daily Beast* had reported that she appeared to endorse racism on Facebook. Turns out she responded to a comment by a Facebook friend who had written of the "need to take this country back from all of these mad coons" with "You tell 'em Eric! lol." When some of the other party young ones objected she deleted the comments terming them "derogatory and outright disgusting." However *Daily Beast* found other interesting material on her page. After an effigy of Sarah Palin was hung somewhere, she had said "What no 'Obama in a noose? ... I am wondering if the guys with the Palin noose would care if we had a bunch of homosexuals in a noose." *DB* also reported, "She's also written that President Obama 'attacks white people' and posted a video claiming Obama believes he has to help African-Americans over whites to 'ensure his own salvation'."

Meanwhile, talk show host Rush Limbaugh rumbles on, elevating the tenor of the nation's political discourse. "The objective is unemployment," he said the other day. "The objective is more food stamp benefits. The objective is more unemployment benefits. The objective is an expanding welfare state. And the objective is to take the nation's wealth and return to it to the nation's quote, 'rightful owners.' Think reparations. Think forced reparations here if you want to understand what actually is going on."

"It's a direct appeal to racial fear and paranoia, and it's deeply insulting to the

President, to Black people, and to anyone who cares about the future of this country," commented the people at ColorOfChange.Org. "We've seen this kind of thing from Rush before. But now, Republican politicians are refusing to denounce what he says, or even disagree with him. When they do, they usually take it back the next day, begging Rush to forgive them."

Former Vice-President Dick Cheney was recently asked about the argument about the future of the GOP between Limbaugh and African American Republican former Secretary of State Colin Powell and responded, "If I had to choose in terms of being a Republican, I'd go with Rush Limbaugh. My take on it was Colin had already left the party. I didn't know he was still a Republican." Powell had previously complained that the party is in "deep trouble" and "getting smaller and smaller."

"You might think Rush and Cheney merely represent the party's extremes, but that misses the larger context." ColoOfChange continued, "The Republican Party has made it clear that they don't want Obama to succeed - even if it means further damage to the economy and to the lives of everyday Americans. It's evident in the 'no' votes Republican members of Congress cast against Obama's budget, the refusal of Republican governors to allow stimulus dollars to flow into their states, and their leadership's refusal to denounce the rhetoric coming from Rush and others."

About the Sonia Sotomayer Senate Confirmation hearings: There was more than racism and sexism at work in Washington last week; some of these suckers are out to sink the Obama Presidency at any cost and shift the nation's political debate far to the right. That's the subtext to this "empathy" thing.

Guest hosting Bill Bennett's radio show today, May 12, Steele demonstrated his flair for hip-hop cadence saying, "Good morning y'all, we're back in the house. We're talking a little bit of Constitution and a little bit Supreme Court. And a whole lot of saving America's judicial system and saving our rights as citizens and not having empathetic judges decide cases, but rather judges who are actually understanding the rule of law and what the Constitution and those laws are all about. And how to apply the facts to the law and the law to the facts. And adjudicate my case. I don't need some judge sitting up there feeling bad for my opponent because of their life circumstances or their condition. And short changing me and my opportunity to get fair treatment under the law. Crazy nonsense empathetic. I'll give you empathy. Empathize right on your behind. Crazy." "Craziness."

The Republican big wigs express empathy and sympathy for "promise keepers" in their own ranks who turn out to be sleazy hypocrites but the woe and behold to anyone whose fate is shaped by oppression or discrimination. It's no coincidence that this theme arises now when millions - through no fault of their own - are losing their homes and or their jobs, while bankers are walking away with sacks full of money they didn't earn. The attack on empathy is part of an effort to promote a moral callousness into public policy at a time of growing economic inequities and deprivation.

"Today we are declaring an end to the era of Republicans looking backward," Steele recently announced. "The era of apologizing for Republicans' mistakes of the past is now officially over. The era of Republican navel gazing is over. We have turned the corner on regret, recrimination, self-pity and self-doubt. Now is the hour to focus all of our energies on winning the future." Stay tuned.


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