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Text of *Radio BC* audio commentary

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Civil Rights via Business Card

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There's a little story out of Orange County, Florida – not a big story, but one that says a great deal about the fault lines in Black politics. The se lines are not new – in fact, they go back into the mists of time in African American history. Essentially, the story from Florida raises the question: should African Americans cheer when an individual Black person enters previously closed doors. How does that help the rest of us?

A construction businessmen named Derrick Wallace heads the Orange Country, Florida NAACP. He recently joined the Republican Party. Wallace says he's been thinking of switching over for a couple of years, and finally made the move. Are the GOP's policies looking more attractive to Mr. Wallace, these days? Well, that's not clear. Wallace started supporting Republicans when he lost a run for mayor of Orlando, in 2003. But his official move to the GOP was, says Wallace, a "purely bus iness decision." In his construction business, Wallace found that most of the people he dealt with were&Republicans. Ninety percent of the time, in fact. Wallace credits Republicans with providing most of the opportunities for his business.

In an interview with the Orlando Sentinel newspaper, Mr. Wallace doesn't mention what the board or membership of his local NAACP chapter thought about his party changeover. Maybe that's because, a couple of years ago, the entire board of the local Republican Party joined the NAACP. One wonders what kind of political conversations occur at NAACP meetings in Orange County, Florida these days, with top officials of a Republican Party that relentlessly steals Black votes sitting there.

But Derrick Wallace sees no contradiction. He thinks the NAACP should be set up along "business lines," to be close to structures of power. That means, close to Republicans. Wallace believes his approach will win "respect" for his local branch of the civil rights organization.

The Black Commentator – Radio BC: Civil Rights via Business Card

However, it doesn't sound to me like Mr. Wallace's branch is a civil rights organization at all. It's an upward mobility vehicle for Mr. Wallace. When he says he wants the organization to get "respect" he means he wants himself to get contracts. And he expects that the Black community of Orange County, Florida will "respect" him for being so slick, so smart that he managed to "get those white folks' money." And that they will be happy for him and proud that a Black man moved up in the world.

Now, this is a small story, but like I said, it speaks volumes. The national NAACP has signed on a businessman as Executive Director. He's comfortable in the boardroom, as was corporate lawyer Vernon Jordan, who used to head the Urban League. Lots of Black folks get a vicarious thrill out of seeing a few of their own in opulent settings. But the masses of Black people can't spend vicarious paychecks, or get vicarious health care, or live in a vicarious house, or cast a vicarious ballot.

It seems that Mr. Wallace is trying to lead Black people into The Vicarious Zone. Believe me, nothing good happens there, except to someone else. For Radio BC, I'm Glen Ford.

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