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**Progressives Must Claim the Political Center
Color of Law**

By David A. Love, JD

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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What's all this talk about politicians moving to the political center?

Every four years, we hear about the need for presidential candidates to move to the center in order to appeal to the audience beyond their party's base.

I think that Texan populist [Jim Hightower](#) said it best when he suggested that "there's nothing in the middle of the road but yellow stripes and armadillos."

A variation on that theme is from the late Republican Barry Goldwater, who said "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice! And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue!"

Political observers ask if Barack Obama is moving to the center. I don't know, and it is not my concern. But I will say that the strategy of going down the middle to score points and win elections, changing one's positions, and flip-flopping, is a time-tested failure. The political graveyard is strewn with the careers of poor souls who followed "conventional wisdom" or the advice of highly paid strategists with their poll-driven drivel. Al Gore and John Kerry - who snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by

becoming wooden centrist caricatures - are two names that come to mind, Bush election stealing notwithstanding. And Hillary Clinton torpedoed her quest for the brass ring from the jump, by positioning herself as a virtual man and a warmonger in support of America's exploits in Iraq. The "conventional wisdom" endorsed this path, but public opinion ultimately did not.

And what exactly is this conventional wisdom? In my humble opinion, it amounts to two things: First, there is the water cooler talk from a manufactured, media-driven punditocracy - "experts" who claim to know, yet possess few if any qualifications for their supposed knowledge, and make their arguments out of thin air. These are the people who will, for example, engage in a lengthy Sunday-morning television discussion on the problems facing the Black community, without a single African American (or anyone who knows a single African American) participating in the discussion. Second, there is the effort to cater to the so-called swing voters, people who are uninformed about politics and the issues, and will vote for the candidate with whom they would prefer to have a beer.

Ultimately, this talk about the fictitious center is unproductive. Rather, the center must be redefined.

We live in extreme times, and positive action of an extreme nature is needed. Capitalism once again is unraveling, as corporate greed and policies of upward wealth distribution take their toll on the common folk. Dinosaur industries such as Big Oil are rewarded for their damage to the environment and are profiting from our misery. Meanwhile, the U.S. auto industry - the people who killed the streetcars and the electric cars throughout the nation, and offered you Hummers while other nations were investing in alternative fuel technology - is repeating the 1970s, collapsing under the weight of its own arrogance and inaction. As the government bails out the mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and the failing Indymac Bank, where is the relief for ordinary citizens who are losing their homes and their jobs and livelihood, those who can no longer afford to live in America? Conditions suggest that with a low-wage job at Wal Mart or McDonald's awaiting them, in a country that does little else than buy cheap foreign goods and make hamburgers, these people are not seeking modest milquetoast solutions to these crises.

Obama has been able to seize on this discontent and desire for change. Certainly, the Republican Party has revealed itself as nothing more than a vehicle for the delivery of corporate largesse - with lip service paid to religious fanatics and the Archie Bunkers of America - and is headed for a well-deserved implosion. But if the Democratic Party - also known too often for cow-towing to corporate interests, failing to seriously pursue a Bush-Cheney impeachment, and capitulating on the Iraq War and immunity for telecom companies that spied on Americans - does not seek meaningful, systemic change, then it won't be far behind on the road to the chopping block.

Progressives find themselves with a golden opportunity to become the new center in American politics. When I say progressives, I mean independents, Greens and other third parties, the Democratic Party base, labor, and other groups. There is much hope that the pernicious Bush era will come to an end with the coming election. When that happens, then the hard work begins, as a quadrennial contest alone does not a movement make. A progressive-led coalition must create a movement that takes back the country, infuses the national dialogue with progressive values, permeates the national consciousness with progressive language, and shapes public policy in a deliberate, long-term manner. Such action will be necessary even under an Obama administration, to ensure that a progressive agenda comes to fruition and has the broad-based support to sustain itself.

Democrats do not need to run to the center, but progressives need to become the new center and lead the way.

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