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**Colin Powell Fights Back
African American Leadership
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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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"Face the Nation" was probably a favored TV venue on Sunday May 24 for most watchers of the Sunday talk shows, because former Secretary of State, Colin Powell defended his place in the Republican Party from charges by Rush Limbaugh and former Vice President Dick Chaney. On the same show a week earlier, Chaney said that he preferred Limbaugh to Powell who had left the Republican party because he voted for Barack Obama; Limbaugh said that Powell did it only because Obama was Black. Powell fired back coolly that neither Chaney nor Limbaugh were on the membership committee of the Republican Party and as such could not decide who was or was not a Republican.

More important, Powell reaffirmed his status as a moderate Republican like the recently deceased Jack Kemp. I will always remember coming back from Japan several years ago, getting a connecting flight in Los Angeles and because the airline had fouled our reservation, it gave my wife and I first class seats. Our seats happened to be next to Secretary of Housing, Jack Kemp and he proceeded to talk both our right arms off, all the way to Washington, DC. He seemed not to have a racially sensitive bone in his body, and was genuinely concerned about policies that would make life better for the disadvantaged blacks. He was excited by his alliance with Kemi Gray, a strong public housing activist whom I knew in Washington, DC, who was trying to empower poor public housing residents. I was not surprised to see that he would become a member of Howard University's Board of Trustees. Colin Powell also was a member of Howard's Board of Trustees signaling his own sensitivity to concerns facing the Black community.

I attended the 1996 convention as a researcher when Powell gave the keynote speech, and when he said that he supported Affirmative Action, he was loudly booed by the Right wing of the Party. However, in his "Face the Nation" appearance, Powell cited several statistics upon which he concluded that for the Republican Party to remain viable it had be an inclusive "big tent" party that would not only make a place for

moderates, but move closer toward the moderate positions that define why the country is now supporting Democrats. He rejected the small government view, rather that Americans wanted effective government, especially now that the private sector had run aground and carried the country with it.

Powell, however, does not deserve complete absolution for his role in the administration of George Bush. He said he was briefed (like Nancy Pelosi) on the fact that the CIA was *considering* the use of Enhanced Interrogation Techniques like water boarding, but didn't object, fearing another 9/11 attack. But Powell was silent when he should have been publicly livid that they put his considerable integrity at issue. Perhaps his way of telegraphing his displeasure was to vote for Barack Obama. Nevertheless, Bush and Chaney should have been grateful that Colin Powell has not done what so many Bush insiders have done, either publish a tell-all book or go on the stump, burnishing their role – and their legacy – in the atrocious decisions made by the Bush/Chaney team.

I have always felt – and still feel – that Colin Powell should be the leader of the Moderate wing of the Republican Party, but that would require him to confront the Right wing hegemony of the party in much stronger terms than anyone has done so far. He notes quite rightly that the base of the party is narrow and if it continues to shrink, events will pass it by. Perhaps this truth should motivate Michael Steele, the current RNC Chair, and rather than feeding the radical Right and “laying prostrate,” as Powell said, before Rush Limbaugh, he should help turn the corner. Yet, his latest statements suggesting that he would go after Barack Obama were crafted in the Limbaugh/Chaney country and now govern Congressional Republican approaches.

The lack of a vigorous Moderate wing of the Republican Party keeps it from joining a rational consensus about the needs of the country and supporting policies that are important to serve the American people which have no ideological bent. Barack Obama has proposed pragmatic approaches that need Republican support but the radical Right has rejected most of them.

This is a moment of opportunity for both Powell and Steele that will test the true courage of their commitment to their country, rather than just to party.


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