



THE INCONVENIENT TRUTH ABOUT THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

CAROL SWAIN

Racist. Sexist. Republican.

These words are virtually interchangeable—at least, according to most professors, journalists, and celebrities. So, are they right? Let’s take a look at history.

The Republican Party was created in 1854. The first Republican Party platform, adopted at the party’s first national convention in 1856, promised to defeat, quote, “those twin relics of barbarism: polygamy and slavery.”

Those “twin relics” were spreading into the western territories. Republicans feared that as those territories became states, polygamy and slavery might become permanent parts of American life. Polygamy—the marriage of one man to multiple women—devalued women and made them a kind of property. Slavery, of course, did the same to blacks. Literally.

The Democrats were so opposed to the Republicans and their anti-slavery stance that in 1860, just six weeks after the election of the first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, South Carolina, a state dominated by Democrats, voted to secede from the union. The Civil War that followed was the bloodiest war in US history. It led to the passage, by Republicans, of the 13th Amendment, which freed the slaves; the 14th Amendment, which gave them citizenship; and the 15th Amendment; which gave them the vote.

In 1870, the first black senator and the first black congressman were sworn in—both Republicans. In fact, every black representative in the House until 1935 was a Republican. And every black senator until 1979 was, too. For that matter, the first female member of Congress was a Republican; the first Hispanic governor and senator were Republicans. The first Asian senator? You get the idea.

Republicans also kept their pledge to defend women’s rights. In 1862, the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act was passed by the Republican-controlled Congress to put an end to polygamy.

In 1920, after 52 years of Democratic Party opposition, the 19th Amendment was ratified thanks to the Republican Congress, which pressured Democratic President Woodrow Wilson to drop his opposition to women’s rights. In the final tally, only 59 percent of House Democrats and 41 percent of Senate Democrats supported women’s suffrage. That’s compared to 91 percent of House Republicans and 82 percent of Senate Republicans. There certainly was a “war on women”—and it was led by the Democratic Party.

But while Republicans had won a major battle for women’s rights, the fight for blacks’ civil

rights had a long way to go. In the 1920s, Republican President Calvin Coolidge declared that the rights of blacks are “just as sacred as those of any other citizen.”

By contrast, when famed sprinter Jesse Owens, a staunch Republican, won four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, he was snubbed by Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt. Roosevelt only invited white Olympians to the White House.

Two decades later, it was a Republican President, Dwight Eisenhower, who sent the 101st Airborne Division to escort black students into Little Rock’s Central High when Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus—a Democrat—refused to honor a court order to integrate the state’s public schools.

The Civil Rights Act of 1960, which outlawed poll taxes and other racist measures meant to keep blacks from voting, was filibustered by 18 Democrats for 125 hours. Not one Republican senator opposed the bill. Its follow-up bill, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, is one of the landmark pieces of legislation in American history. That, too, survived a filibuster by Democrats thanks to overwhelming Republican support.

But, you might be thinking, all that’s in the past. What have Republicans done for women and blacks lately? The answer you’d hear from professors, journalists and celebrities is... “not much.” And this time, they’d be right. They’d be right because the Republican Party treats blacks and women as it treats everyone: as equals.

The Democratic Party never has, and it still doesn’t. Today’s Democrats treat blacks and women as victims who aren’t capable of succeeding on their own.

The truth is, this is just a new kind of contempt.

So, there is a party with a long history of racism and sexism...but it ain’t the Republicans.

I’m Carol Swain, for Prager University.