



“Babylonian Captivity of the African American Vote 2020— An Epistle to the Church”

By

Roderick O. Ford, Litt.D.¹

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¹ Roderick O Ford is an American lawyer. He holds the Doctor of Letters degree (Christian Theology—Law and Religion, '16) from St. Clements University.

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† TO MY DEAR AND BELOVED FELLOW AMERICAN CLERGY, FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN BAR, DR. CLAYTON COWART OF THE CHURCH OF GOD THE BIBLEWAY, AND TO THE EDITOR OF THE FLORIDA SENTINEL BULLETIN:

The topic of this letter is “Babylonian Captivity of the African American Vote- 2020.” While I am an independent, Evangelical minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I make no bones about the fact that I am also a secular-trained, civil rights attorney and political theorist who is neither a Democrat nor a Republican. In the past, I have affiliated or “caucused” with Democrats, but I am philosophically and politically conservative and I have voted Republican. My official political affiliation is “Independent.” And I wish to go on record, here, not as being a Democrat, a Republican, a capitalist, a socialist or a communist, but rather as being a “radical Christian.” And thus I strongly admonish the African American Church to think separately and independently outside of the box of secular politics.

As such, I would be less than honest if I did not say that I do like what the Democratic Party has done to the Black Church or to the African American community. And I hope that someday the African American community might extricate itself from this Babylonia captivity of the Democratic Party. I simply do not like it, and I am writing this epistle to speak out in the prophetic tradition.

Indeed, where Truth speaks, Christ speaks! As St. Augustine

reminds us, Christ is Truth. And so, my reasons for writing to you is to say a word of truth, not only about the role of the Black Church in the present political crisis, but also to explain how the American Democratic Party has a sort of demonic grip upon the African American vote, and how it is slowly asphyxiating of African American moral and cultural life—especially the deterioration of the black family and the devastating impact of mass incarceration upon African American men and boys. I would not therefore ask African Americans to vote Republican or to enter into another form of Babylonian enslavement to the Republican Party. What is needed today, within the Black Church and the African American community, is critical thinking along a moral path to economic independence.

A. The Babylonian Captivity of the Black Vote

In the *Holy Bible*, the Prophet Jeremiah (circa 650 B.C. to circa 570 B.C.) forewarned his beloved Jewish nation in to reform and to return from their wicked ways, or else the God Jehovah would send the entire nation of Israel into some form of spiritual, financial, cultural, psychological, as well as physical captivity. But Israel would not repent, and so the LORD sent the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar to the gates of Jerusalem, where he laid siege to that ancient city in 605 B.C. The Jews went into their infamous Babylonian captivity. While in Babylon, for seventy years, those Jews paid tribute to their Babylonian conquerors. And so, too, since the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, the African American community has descended into some form of spiritual, financial, cultural, psychological, as well as physical captivity to the American Democratic-Party elite, who have so repackaged the prevailing political discourse of the day, that they been able to persuade African Americans to shoot for very low goals and to embrace mortal sin—things which the Black Church have long taught against—as new African American cultural norms! Indeed, the American Democratic Party has sought even to normalize African American dysfunctional conditions—whether that be financial exploitation that is pervasive in every aspect of inner-city life of the

African American poor; the massive imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of African American men; the perennial under-employment of African American college graduates; and the decline of the two-parent African American household. Most ominously, the growing secularization of American culture has led to the steady erosion and marginalization of the Black Church and faith in the cultural life of the African American community.

The Democratic Party and culture have so thoroughly infiltrated the Black Church, that the Black Church is today largely unable to fulfill its prophetic mission and role within the secular body politic. Indeed, for whenever the Black Church says, “return from your wicked ways,” the Democratic Party responds, “Not so, the doctrine ‘Separation of Church and State’ prohibits this!” When the Black Church says, “we need morals and values for our Black youth,” the Democratic Party says, “Not so, ‘Separation of Church and State’ will not allow these things to be taught in the public schools!” When the Black Church says, “Christ-centered family enrichment programmes will cure the epidemic of the decline of the black family, black poverty, and black crime, the Democratic Party says, “Not so, ‘Separation of Church and State’ will not tolerate reverse discrimination against alternative lifestyles.” Whenever the Black Church says, “but black fathers need gainful employment and living wages sufficient to support the black family,” the Democratic Party says, “But your proposals to support heterosexual black males discriminate against women and white persons, and, besides all of that, the two-parent heterosexual family structure is no longer the foundation of American secular law and social policy.” And, finally, when the Black Church retorts by saying “but marriage is defined in the *Holy Bible*, and without strong Black marriages, the plight of the Black community will be quite negligible for incalculable time” the Democratic Party says, “Not so, ‘Separation of Church and State simply will not tolerate such ideas to be discussed in the public sphere!” At the same time, the American Democratic Party has demanded that African American pastors craftily weave Democratic Party ideology into their Sunday Sermons and weekly church meetings and to deliver the Black

vote to the Democratic Party—without question, without hesitation, and without careful reflection as to the moral judgments and feelings of the African American church body or community.

I do not here make the case for the Republican Party or for Donald Trump, but I do propose that the Black Church show more backbone in standing up against unscrupulous politicians who do not respect the moral integrity of either the Gospel or the Black Church. I recognize that the all-mighty dollar is, at the end of the day, a major factor. Of course, there are Democratic-sponsored favors and jobs to be dispensed with to the privileged few, but the “spiritual strivings” of the African American working classes—as W.E.B. Du Bois described it in his masterpiece *The Souls of Black Folk*—continue to go unnoticed and unheeded by the political elite of either major American political party, but especially the Democratic Party! At least the Republican Party stands ready to negotiate with conservative African American leadership, within the context of its free-market, laissez-faire programme, and within a conservative-Christian context, it cannot be said that the Republican Party is promoting policies which undermine the moral values which are absolutely essential for African American progress: *family values*. On the other hand, today, the Democratic Party’s grip upon the African American vote is the modern-day version of the Babylonian captivity. Please allow me to further explain my analysis of the current crisis.

B. Are We In A New Political Epoch?

Strange to relate, but one thing is obvious: the American political establishment—Republican and Democratic alike—has historically refused to expend its political capital on ameliorating the plight of Black workers, and Donald Trump may today reap the boon of votes from thousands of disenchanting African Americans. Indeed, we are at an end of a political epoch! And we are at the beginning of a new one! (Vice President Joe Biden symbolizes the old political epoch. President Donald Trump symbolizes a new political epoch.) But the dull

grumbling from beneath our feet, within the underground—which we all know exists but few of us have courage enough to admit or to bring attention—is the *strange judgment* and *strange feeling* amongst educated, thoughtful African American men! What is that strange judgment and feeling but that unpardonable, seditious notion that somehow, someday President Donald Trump may be their best hope for the future—heterosexual manhood, fatherhood, and traditional black family are today up for grabs in the 2020 election!

C. Roots of the Present Crisis

There is a historic reason for all of this: the plight of African American workers is riveted to chapters of American history which are disgusting and embarrassing. We simply cannot come to terms with the fact that when the nation unleashed four million African slaves into American freedom, it did so without land, money, or basic political rights and legal protection. We simply cannot come to terms with the fact that from between 1865 and 1968, we never wanted the Black worker to compete on a level playing field with white workers, because the South could still make huge profits from cotton, tobacco, and other labor-intensive industries in the South.

D. Republican Party and Lincoln

The Republican Party of 1863 to 1870 was clearly the party of Abraham Lincoln and thus it was very favorable toward the economic plight of the Black worker. Then in 1876 came the political compromise which ended Reconstruction in the South and relegated the Black worker to an economic system of peonage, sharecropping (the ‘mortgage-lien’ system), jim crow racial segregation, and violent mob frenzy. The national Republican Party in 1876 had to leave the American South and American Negro in this condition, because white workers West, South and North wanted to restrict competition with Black labor.

From 1876 to 1930, the Republican Party maintained its ties to

African American leaders, but President Ulysses S. Grant (Administration: 1869- 1876) was the last Republican President who genuinely befriended black leaders such as Frederick Douglass and who expressed genuine concern toward the plight of the Black Worker. After the election of Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876, the Republican Party was still the political party of the American Negro but the Republican Party—as a result of its 1876 Political Compromise—could not even enforce the sweeping civil rights laws which it had passed during the days of the Reconstruction Congress. The Republican Party, in the end, had saved the Union but for all practical purposes it left the American Negro in economic thralldom.

From 1877 to 1895, Frederick Douglass repeatedly charged that the national Republican Party had rejected its loyal friends (the American Negro) and fraternized with former traitors (the old Southern slave holders). From 1900 to 1932, the African American worker had nothing for which to vote. The Party of Lincoln seemed dead. In 1912, W.E.B. Du Bois tried to turn the Black electorate toward Woodrow Wilson and the Democrats. However, when President Wilson got elected and established Jim Crow policies throughout the federal government and Washington, D.C., Du Bois and others were embarrassed and dismayed. The Democrats (“Dixiecrats”) were clearly the party of the Southern aristocrats and presumably the white working man from between 1877 and 1948.

E. Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal

World War II catapulted labor leader A. Phillip Randolph to the national stage. Mr. Randolph and his Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters became the backbone of the American civil rights movement, beginning in the 1940s. The Great Migration of the 1940s sent 5 million black workers to America’s northern and western cities—there, they joined the northern Democratic Party (the party of Roosevelt and the New Deal). This new political alliance was not perfect, but at least in Roosevelt and the New Deal the Black worker had something for which

to vote. When following world war President Truman integrated the Armed Forces in 1948 and adopted a Civil Rights Platform, Strom Thurmond and the Dixiecrats broke away from the northern Democratic Party and slowly evolved into Southern Republicans.

Then came the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*—which struck at the heart of Jim Crow—integrating America’s public schools, but *with all deliberate speed!* Republican President Eisenhower expressed dismay at his newly-appointed Chief Justice Earl Warren, former Republican Governor of California—but the deed was done: racial segregation was declared unconstitutional and was on its deathbed.

F. Kennedy, Civil Rights and White Reaction

In 1960, the northern Democrats nominated Senator Kennedy for the Presidency. In Kennedy, the American Negro had a President for which they felt they could speak to with confidence. Kennedy’s successor Lyndon Johnson would go on to sign into legislation sweeping civil rights laws (The Civil Rights Act of 1964; the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and the Fair Housing Act of 1968), for which Johnson acknowledged had caused the Democrats to have “lost the South for a generation.” The South turned Republican after 1968. The Democrats paid a heavy political price from between 1970 to 1992: thereafter, the Democrats learned to evade the African American worker in order to regain the White House and political power and leverage in Washington, D.C.

G. Clinton and the Blue-Dog Democrats of the 1990s

The Democratic answer to the Reagan-Bush era (1980-1992) was President William Jefferson Clinton, who figured out how to appeal to the conservative concerns of white workers and white Southerners (i.e., to win back the Reagan Democrats) and yet, simultaneously, cater to big business. Under this scheme, civil rights and the plight of the Black

worker had to be sacrificed: the Democratic Party had officially evaded the plight of the Black worker in order to gain and maintain political power. The best way for the new “blue dog” Democrats to appeal to white Southerners and white workers—and thus to win back the old Regan Democrats-- was attack civil rights, not overtly, but clandestinely and subversively through the criminal justice system. This was the true origin of the 1994 Crime Bill. This was Senator Joe Biden’s Democratic Party of the 1990s up through the year 2010. And there was never a meaningful dialogue with senior African American clergymen as to how to get at the seat of the social problems from within the African American community.

H. Democrats Sacrifice the Black Poor and Civil Rights to Win Elections

Harvard Professor Bruce Western conducted an eight-year study on the relationship between the American penal system on economic inequality, particularly in the African American and Latino communities. His work, which is titled *Punishment and Inequality in America*, was published in 2006. This book covers the following topics: (a) Chapter 1, “Mass Imprisonment”; (b) Chapter 2, “Inequality, Crime and the Prison Boom”; (c) Chapter 3, “The Politics and Economics of Punitive Criminal Justice”; (d) Chapter 4, “Invisible Inequality”; (e) Chapter 5, “The Labor Market After Prison”; (f) Chapter 6, “Incarceration, Marriage, and Family Life”; and (g) Chapter 7, “Did the Prison Boom Cause the Crime Drop?”

Through empirical evidence, Professor Western explains how the dramatic increase in incarceration in the United States during the 1990s was largely unjustifiable, because there was no corresponding increase in the number of crimes during this period. To the contrary, Professor Western states in no uncertain terms that “the prison boom was a political project that arose partly because of rising crime but also in response to the upheaval in American race relations in the 1960s and the collapse of urban labor markets for unskilled men in the 1970s. The

social activism and disorder of the 1960s fueled the anxieties and resentments of working-class whites. These disaffected whites... through the 1970s and 1980s, drawn by a law and order message that drew veiled connections between civil rights activism and violent crime among blacks in inner cities.”

Perhaps the most sobering analysis that Professor Western makes is that mass incarceration had undermined the American civil rights movement. “Although civil rights laws established a legal equality between blacks and whites,” Western writes, “they could not protect against the powers of economic dislocation and political reaction.... The punitive turn in criminal justice disappointed the promise of the civil rights movement and its burden fell heavily on disadvantaged African Americans. By cleaving off poor black communities from the mainstream, the prison boom left Americans more divided. Incarceration rates are now so high that the stigma of criminality brands not only individuals, but an entire generation of young black men with little schooling.” Next, the “blue-dog” Democrats converted civil rights into “white civil rights”: women’s rights, elder rights, rights of the disabled, rights of gays, lesbians, bi-sexuals, transsexuals and the like—but never any rights for heterosexual African American boys, men, husbands, or fathers!

Under the modern-day Democratic umbrella, the working-class African American male is *persona non grata*! Since the early 1990s, the economic pressures on the working-class African American family and the increasing incarceration and unemployment of working-class black men created a metamorphosis in the psychology of black-male/ black-female interrelationships and a revolution in the African American household, which is today largely headed by black females. Slowly but surely, starting in the last two decades of the twentieth century, and continuing on through the early decades of the twenty-first century, black females were deemed slightly more qualifiedly employable into responsible positions than black males. This phenomenon has historic origins. From the end of the Civil War through the 1990s, the impact of

history continued to influence, instruct, and cripple black male/ black female relations and family formation. Today's Democratic Party loathes the idea of heterosexual black men being heads of African American households; and today it has no programme that is designed to ameliorate the plight of working-class African American families! The Democratic Party can talk to us about health care, the rights of women, and the plight of the LGBTQ community—but talk of ameliorating the plight of the African American family is seditious speech, for Democrats.

I. President Obama and Senator Harris—Race Symbolism Without Substance?

This is the Democratic Party to which President Barack Obama fell heir in 2008. Indeed, President Obama rightfully embodied a great deal of hope for African American voters. But he was an African American Democratic President who had no other option but to evade the socioeconomic plight of Black workers in order to maintain political power and to govern. Thus relying upon his superb diplomatic skills of balancing psychological needs of conservatives, Obama chose Senator Joe Biden, a Clinton-era “blue-dog” Democrat, as his running mate. But Biden signaled Obama’s wink and nod to the Clinton legacy and to the general programme of the “blue dog” Democrats of scape-goating the African American poor—and especially poor, black males. And Obama’s “Morehouse College” commencement address in 2013 opened everyone else’s eyes as to what Obama may have been thinking in his heart, all along, about the black poor. To many African Americans, Obama’s “Morehouse College” commencement speech was disappointing, fell flat, and revealed his lack of experience with real life in the South. And if I recall correctly, Professor Michael Eric Dyson, who is a Georgetown and Vanderbilt professor, honestly and soberly “weighed in the balance” President Obama’s eight-year Presidential term, and found it “wanting,” but not without acknowledging all of the good which Obama’s symbolism accomplished. Hence, as the rap-mogul Puff-Diddy Combs once observed, “We got a little short-changed with

Obama.”

And now, Vice President Biden’s running mate, Senator Kamala Harris, a former prosecutor and champion of the American criminal justice system, who is herself married to a white male, is naturally a mystery to rank-and-file African Americans who are unable to appreciate her course work at Howard University and black-college sorority affiliations. At worst, they view her as a “former prosecutor,” and as such, she appears to be Biden’s signal to that same Clinton and “blue-dog” Democratic legacy of being ruthless tough on crime and the black poor.

Since the year 2000, more and more, the average African American has had nowhere to turn nothing for which to vote—except for “symbolism.” In 2008 and 2012, African American workers understood that a vote for Obama was a vote for the “symbolism” of hope. To be sure, President Obama’s “symbolism” did have a great deal of value—there was, for example, great value in having an African American President in office, because this helped to negate centuries of adverse, racial stereotypes which have been used to deny basic civil and human rights to African Americans. And yet African Americans rightfully understood that “symbolism” alone could not pay their monthly bills or thwart racism and discrimination from determined bigots. The murders of hundreds of unarmed and innocent African Americans at the hands of police officers was perhaps an exemplification of callous indifference to the collateral damage of selfishly winning elections without careful aforethought regarding “the least of these.”

Unfortunately, since the year 2000, Republican leadership of President George W. Bush and Presidential candidate Mitt Romney had fallen heir to the “Southern Strategy” of Nixon, Reagan, and H.W. Bush,— which was to appeal to white workers, white Southerners, the Middle Class, and big business interests. Although a few African Americans fit within the last two groups (i.e., Middle Class & Business Class), the vast majority of African Americans are underprivileged and

clearly do not fit into any of these groups. With the Republican Party being genuinely disinterested in the plight of the African American poor and working classes, and with the Democratic Party clearly evading those classes, the African American voter has had no other option but to fall back upon their own resourcefulness—upon their ability to collectively bargain with employers, chief executive officers, and human resources departments in order to gain entrance into private employments.

African American men, especially, without assistance from the Democratic Party, have been forced to go directly to powerful whites—employers and power brokers who act like and support Donald Trump—for jobs, capital, and economic cooperation. In other words, today, more and more African American men—out of sheer economic necessity and survival—are clearly unafraid of negotiating directly with conservative white Americans, without guidance and aid from white liberals or anyone else. And perhaps now more and more African American men are utilizing those same survival strategies in their consideration of negotiations with, and voting for, President Trump. Up until the second Obama administration, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans had been willing to afford to expend their political capital on addressing the problems and critical needs of African Americans. Nobody else was looking out for the peculiar needs of the Black poor. And nobody dared speak about the plight of heterosexual African American males—for to utter such speech at a Democratic or Republican convention would be tantamount to sedition!

J. Rise of Donald Trump and the Black Vote

We should not be surprised that President Donald Trump has made such great headway into certain sectors of this isolated, disgruntled African American community—professional boxers, professional ball players, professional hip-hop artists and rappers, inner-city pastors, the rank-and-file African American underprivileged—who simply do not relate to either the Democrats or the traditional Republicans. Donald

Trump’s egalitarian populism certainly has attracted a base of right-wing white support, but inner-city African Americans are used to dealing with employers like Donald Trump, and they don’t care if “red necks” also vote for Trump, so long as Trump delivers on the economy, and make inroads into decreasing the African American unemployment rate, and support historically-black colleges and universities, and meliorate the plight of Black mass incarceration. Donald Trump has done these things! Nobody else has looked out for the African American workers, and so African American workers must look out for themselves. And here the Trump campaign has caused African American workers to take a second look at the G.O.P.—not because they are ignorant, but because they are shrewd.

CONCLUSION

The Black Church will cease to carry out its spiritual mission and function, if during the present political crisis, through moral cowardice and callous indifference, it becomes ashamed of the fundamental message of its principal founder, the Prince of Peace, and sells its birthright to prosperity and freedom for a “bowl of red pottage,” that is today presented to it by the American Democratic Party, which, as I have described, is its proverbial Babylonian captivity. Indeed, if the Black Church cannot remind the American Democratic Party—including Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Kamala Harris—that “*life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment,*” and that “*Man shall not live by bread alone,*” then it shall be come as “*the salt [that] have lost his savour, ... to be cast out.*”

For this reason, the Black Church ought to remind the Democratic Party that the primary barometer of African American life is the *health of the Black family*²—not health care, taxes, social security, or even jobs.

² “The breakdown of the black family was first brought to national attention in 1965 by sociologist and later Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in the groundbreaking Moynihan Report (also known as “The Negro Family: The Case For National Action”).

This does not mean that health care, taxes, social security, jobs, and the like, are not important, but it does mean that *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceed from the mouth of God.”* Higher aims, that fine breeding which we call “culture,” human development, and the training of men and women in righteous and virtuous living is what the African American community sorely needs, not simply houses, cars, food, and clothes. The Black Church must be Christian-enough to espouse Christian ideals before the Democratic platform, and to remind the Democratic Party that what the African American community needs most are strong, morally-courageous, gainfully-employed black husbands and fathers in the home, and virtuous black wives and mothers raising healthy black children. If the Black Church cannot do this, then it will do nothing more than perpetuate the proverbial Babylonian captivity of the African American community to a ruthless, exploitative secular political system.

While I have much more to say on this subject matter, I believe that I should end this letter here but with one closing thought, and that is to remind each of us that the African American community should no longer be beholden to a specific political ideology or party, to the point

Moynihan's report made the argument that the relative absence of nuclear families (those having both a married father and mother present) in black America would greatly hinder further black socio-economic progress. The current most widespread African American family structure consisting of a single parent has historical roots dating back to 1880. A study of 1880 family structures in Philadelphia, showed that three-quarters of black families were nuclear families, composed of two parents and children. Data from U.S. Census reports reveal that between 1880 and 1960, married households consisting of two-parent homes were the most widespread form of African-American family structures. Although the most popular, married households decreased over this time period. Single-parent homes, on the other hand, remained relatively stable until 1960; when they rose dramatically. In the Harlem neighborhood of New York City in 1925, 85 percent of kin-related black households had two parents. When Moynihan warned in his 1965 report on the coming destruction of the black family, however, the out-of-wedlock birthrate had increased to 25% among the black population. **This figure continued to rise over time and in 1991, 68% of black children were born outside of marriage. U.S. Census data from 2010 reveal that more African-American families consisted of single mothers than married households with both parents. In 2011, it was reported that 72% of black babies were born to unmarried mothers. As of 2015, at 77.3 percent, black Americans have the highest rate of non-marital births among native Americans.**” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_family_structure

at which it can no longer attest to the Truth—even terrible and difficult truths—of the present age; or to a point at which the African American community can no longer soberly and honestly look at its own unique social problems, and to fairly assess whether a particular political philosophy or party can meet the demands of solving those problems. Once we cross the line of intellectual dishonesty, at that point we can no longer proactively and creatively address our own unique problems, and thus we descend both morally and spiritually into status of blind leaders of the blind. That is not the proper role and function of the Christian Church!

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” -- Matthew 5:14-16

We must therefore be willing to negotiate with Democrats *and* Republicans alike, protecting the unique interests and needs of the vulnerable and underprivileged of every race, color, ethnicity or creed—but especially emphasizing the unique problems facing African American boys, men, husbands, and fathers; and we must do this, no longer as dependent wards of the Democratic Party, but rather as free men and as free women who are capable of taking hold of the reigns of civil government under any set of circumstances, and who can analyze the world both morally and objectively for ourselves.

Yours Faithfully,

Roderick O. Ford

Minister Roderick O. Ford
Reformed Methodist