

October 6, 2004

The Black Vote in November

This dead-even presidential election may be decided by the black turn-out in the big cities of five swing states.

In Ohio this means Cleveland, Cincinnati, Akron, and Columbus.

In Wisconsin this means Milwaukee.

In Florida this means Miami, Pensacola, and Tallahassee.

In Michigan this means Detroit and Flint.

In Pennsylvania this means Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

Polls suggest that John Kerry is getting 92 per cent of the black vote. But nobody knows how much of the black vote—including millions of new registrations-- will actually show up on election day.

The black vote poured out for Robert Kennedy, Bill Clinton, and of course, for Rev, Jesse Jackson. But it stayed home for Walter Mondale, Mike Dukakis, and was just so-so for Al Gore.

Luckily for the Democrats, much of the black population is concentrated in cities in the industrial swing states, so rich in electoral votes.

The individual most responsible for producing a huge African-American turn-out on November 2 is Harlem's Bill Lynch. His title is deputy national campaign manager, and he has been putting in 18 hour days in Washington for months.

Mr. Lynch was David Dinkins campaign manager in 1989, when the black turn-out exceeded all expectations in both the primary and general election.

Mr. Lynch is 63 and had a kidney transplant from his son eight years ago. His game is grassroots organizing, alliances with labor unions and churches, and personal serenity in a crisis. If Mr. Kerry wins, he should thank William Lynch Jr. for that kidney.

In an interview yesterday, Mr., Lynch told me, "The Kerry campaign had budgeted \$29 million on black voter turn-out, The campaign is buying more time and space in black media than ever before in a presidential cycle.

"Spike Lee's company is making the ads," he continued." Senator Kerry will visit at least one African-American church every Sunday for the rest of the campaign.

"I am relying on the churches and ministers, and local elected officials for GOTV (Get-out-the vote). Local people are the most effective surrogates and catalysts. We are doing massive door-to-door canvassing by professional organizers in the cities like Cleveland, Pensacola, and Philadelphia."

Mr. Lynch is also organizing a national campaign to neutralize what he calls, "Voter suppression efforts." Committees of lawyers are already at work in protecting voting rights, scrutinizing voting rolls, and monitoring the adding of newly registered voters to the official list of eligible voters. We already have lawyers in every precinct that matters."

"I don't think they will be able to stop, or discourage, folks from voting this time, as they did in 2000 in Florida," Mr. Lynch added.

Unaffiliated campaign consultant Hank Schienkopf told the Sun, "Ohio will decide this election, and the black vote can decide Ohio. Bill Lynch knows better than anyone how to turn out the black vote." "

In 2000, Al Gore lost Ohio by 3 percent after he stupidly cancelled all his TV advertising with 16 days to go, to invest all his resources in Florida.

Mr. Lynch believes the economy will energize black voters. Unemployment is twice as high among blacks than it is among whites. Cleveland has the highest poverty rate of any big American city.

And it doesn't help Mr. Bush that vice president Cheney voted against the Martin Luther King holiday bill. and against a resolution urging the release of Nelson Mandela from prison.

A recent New York Times poll showed that an astonishing 93 per cent of blacks believe the president was not legitimately elected in 2000. This is a hidden stick of dynamite that can cause black turn-out to explode.

On Monday Sen. Kerry met with over 60 black ministers from around the country in Philadelphia, on GOTV planning. The Democratic nominee met with another 50 ministers the day before in Cleveland. At both meetings, Rev. Jesse Jackson spoke to great affect.

President Bush is making his own strenuous effort through the black clergy to do better among black voters this time. And his constitutional amendment against same sex marriage has won over some prominent Baptist preachers.

The black vote is the sleeping giant of this election. It is the mission of Bill Lynch of Harlem, to wake it up.

My instinct is that emotions are sky-high, and turn-out will exceed the pollsters' projections in many areas. Particularly among black voters who feel injured by the economy, empowered by the closeness of this election, and disenfranchised by the last election.