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**Minorities and Conservatism:
Applying Essentialism to Political Identities**

For decades, liberal politicians and pundits have overlooked and underestimated the existence of conservative voters from minority backgrounds. Communities of color, immigrants, and Black folks have been subjected to the assumption that their identities make them liberals by necessity, rather than conservatives by belief. However, their automatic assignment to the Democratic party is a false reality that leans heavily on racial and ethnic essentialism, a network of precarious assumptions that erase all other aspects of identity. But in the first half of the twentieth century, African Americans were celebrated as staunch Republicans, and by the 1970s, Latino voters were helping elect Republicans to office across the country.¹ This little-remembered history problematizes assumptions about race and ethnicity as unchanging, essential, and determining factors of political identity, and instead offers a glimpse of the diversity within a political ideology and party within various historical contexts.

¹ Cadava, Geraldo. *The Hispanic Republican: The Shaping of an American Political Identity, From Nixon to Trump*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers. 10.

In his book, *The Hispanic Republican: The Shaping of an American Political Identity, From Nixon to Trump*, author and historian Geraldo Cadava illuminates the issue at the core of assuming the politics of Latinos as a wide group as simply a matter of religion or culture:

“Hispanics don’t vote for Republicans because they’re Catholic or Cuban; They vote for Republicans because they’ve developed considerable loyalty to the Republican Party. To describe Hispanic Republicans as tradition-bound, freedom-loving capitalists gives weight to the idea that Hispanics are natural conservatives.”²

Not mentioned by Cadava is the damaging and overplayed stereotype of the Latino American nuclear family, a tightly-knit, highly disciplined, and faith-oriented family comprised of multiple generations. Such a family unit suggests a commitment to the traditional “family values” politics that made their way to Republican agendas towards the latter part of the twentieth century. Similarly, Black conservatism ties essential qualities and values of Black families and communities to the founding principles and guiding beliefs of the Republican Party.

And yet Latinos have hardly been the only minority group believed to be “natural” conservatives or liberals. As early as the 1980s, African Americans who identified as Republicans were jokingly believed to be nonexistent, and not because they did not

² Cadava, Geraldo. *The Hispanic Republican: The Shaping of an American Political Identity, From Nixon to Trump*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers. 23.

actually exist, but because of the rampant racialization of the Republican party. As historian Leah Wright Rigueur describes it in her book, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power*, African American conservatives appeared to be “racial turncoat[s]”, who had “disavowed [their] longtime home in the Democratic Party.”³ This concept that Black conservative voters were somehow betraying their racial identity continues today, particularly in the wake of the 2016 presidential election.

Still, over the years, Democrats have attempted to brand themselves as the only party for immigrants, women, Black communities, Latinos, and LGBTQ folk. At the same time, exit polls from the 2016 presidential election were flush with surprises for hopeful Democrats. According to the Pew Research Center’s analysis of such polls, 28% of Latinos, 39% of all women, and 14% of LGBTQ voters cast their ballots for Trump.⁴ While the majority of these voting groups supported Clinton, white women’s support for Trump particularly shocked liberals; somewhere between 47% and 52% of white women chose Trump over Clinton, resulting in countless op-eds from left-leaning media.

In fact, conservative-allied political organizations that center minority voices have been around for decades. Founded in 1977, the group Log Cabin Republicans is dedicated to advocating for conservative members of the LGBTQ community. Likewise, The Latino Coalition was created in 1995 to better serve Latino communities primarily

³ Rigueur, Leah Wright. *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015. Introduction.

⁴ “An examination of the 2016 electorate, based on validated voters.” Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Published August 9, 2018.
<https://www.people-press.org/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/>

through fiscally-conservative economic policies. One of the countless organizations for Black conservatives, the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) was founded in 1942. Though initially a proponent for the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, CORE eventually came to endorse Richard Nixon's campaign in 1972. Time and time again, American conservatism defies its perceived whites-only boundary, instead existing as a racially diverse political identity.