The 11 Percent: Black Conservatives in America

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Tonyé Vickers is not your average Donald J. Trump supporter. He was born in Connecticut and grew up in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. He sports wild and crazy hair colors—most recently blonde—and loves to model. He’s a gay, black man living in New York City.

Vickers met Trump before he announced his candidacy for president. Vickers said, “I had asked him what he can do for me as a black gay man living in America, and his response shocked me. He said nothing.”

But it was what he said next that convinced Vickers that Trump would deserve his vote if he did decide to run.

“Are you an American though? And I’m like yes.” Trump then told him he could help him as an American. “Don’t let your color and your sexual orientation define you as a person…you’re an American.” Trump told him.

Just a few months later, Donald Trump descended the escalator in Trump Tower and announced that he would run for president in the 2016 election. From that moment onward, Vickers campaigned vigorously for Trump, dedicating social media pages to him and making sure he was well versed on all of Trump’s policies and campaign promises—as well as those of his opponent Hillary Clinton, in case he needed to rebut some of her supporters.

“I never ever thought i would run this hard for someone on the republican party. And I’m proud to say I played a big part in helping him get here,” Vickers said.

But the numbers reveal that the majority of black Americans who did support Donald Trump are men. Thirteen percent voted for Trump, compared to 4 percent of black women. Vickers and others black supporters say they think Trump would bring back jobs and support the military. Nor do they believe the Democrats have ever had the best interests of African-Americans at heart.

“I know I’ll have more opportunities now,” said Vickers. “I feel that a future with Donald Trump as president is a future I can live for.”

But not all black Republicans voted for Trump. Joseph Pinion is the social media chair for the New York Young Republican’s Club. He is fiscally conservative but he couldn’t ignore Trump’s bigotry, racism, and sexism to vote for him on November 8.

“I can’t turn a blind eye to prejudice, I can’t turn a blind eye to bigotry, and I can’t turn a blind eye to racism and xenophobia.” he said.

Pinion grew up in a democratic household, so he understands the inclination of African-Americans to stick with the party. But he said he thinks many are limiting themselves, and may find they agree with more conservative ideas than they think.
Historically, black Americans did not always identify primarily as democrats. According to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington D.C., blacks were just as likely to identify as republican as they were democrat 80 years ago—37 to 44 percent.

The first shift came in 1948, when President and Democrat Harry Truman made promises for better voter protection laws and other civil rights. More African-Americans started identifying as democrat, but between 18 and 25 percent still identified as republican up until 1964—it was then that President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Barry Goldwater said it was unconstitutional—that most black Americans shifted their loyalty to the Democratic Party and it’s been there ever since. By 2014, 80 percent of African-Americans identified themselves as democratic or left-leaning, compared to the 11 percent who are republican or right-leaning.

“We were taught to vote democrat, we were taught to vote for whoever was on the [democratic] ticket,” said Lynette “Diamond” Hardaway, a former Democrat from North Carolina. She’s one half the duo “Diamond and Silk”, black sisters who campaigned Trump. “We were lifetime Democrats and found that just because you’re black, you don’t have to vote democrat. You can vote for the person, instead of the party.”

Hardaway said Trump’s stance on illegal immigration and the economy appealed to her.

“I like the fact that he’s real, I like the fact that he wants to secure the border and keep us safe, he wants to bring back our good jobs and unite the country.” said Hardaway.

Her sister, Rochelle “Silk” Richardson, agreed. “What we look at is not the fact that we’re black Republicans, but we are Americans voting for Donald J. Trump because he is the better person for the job right now.”

Regardless of who they voted for, as African-Americans with right leaning ideologies, Vickers, Pinion, and Diamond and Silk have faced assumptions about their character. They get called “racist” against their own people or “sell outs”. It’s particularly upsetting for Pinion, who often finds himself offended by the things Trump and other Republicans have said in the media.

“All these things that probably offends you, I’m even more offended by because these are members of my party,” he said. “These are people that claim to uphold the principles that I think are the tenets of what it means for us to have a truly exceptional society, so it can be frustrating.”

Vickers even found himself ostracized by his own family and friends.

“I became the black sheep of the family. My brothers stopped talking to me—aunts, uncles, and cousins stopped talking to me, friends stopped talking to me.” he said.
Despite other African-Americans opinions about him, Vickers has faith he chose the right candidate.

“My president has won, the people’s president has won and I have faith he is going to be the best damn president this country has ever had.”