

**The
BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

Issue 166 – January 12, 2006

Freedom Rider
Lynn Swann and Black Republicans
by Margaret Kimberley

[click here to become a](#)

bc PAID SUBSCRIBER

(Use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page)

Printer Friendly – PDF Format



Copyright © 2002 - 2006
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved

Former football star Lynn Swann recently announced his candidacy for the Republican gubernatorial nomination in Pennsylvania. Swann has no qualifications to be a Governor. In fairness, that makes him no different from Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose only qualification to govern California was movie stardom. If unqualified white people can run for office and win, it is hard to argue against unqualified black people doing the same.

Athletes have always made attractive political candidates. They have instant name recognition and popularity. Voters have warm and fuzzy feelings for them. Swann was a legendary player with the Pittsburgh Steelers when they won four Super Bowls in the 1970s. He is good looking and articulate. Those are solid political credentials in this country.

In recent years Swann began earning his Republican bona fides. He is Chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. While campaigning for George W. Bush he actually called him "the most qualified and credible candidate" and managed to keep a straight face.

Swann hasn't said very much about what he plans to do should he be elected. He is in favor of "responsible" tax cuts, sounds like "compassionate" conservatism, and is against abortion. He also says that Democrats take black voters for granted. He clearly knows the GOP mantra by heart.

Swann was a Democrat until he saw the light and joined the GOP. Who knows if he had a change of heart or if he saw the political light. If he is being cynical then he has made a sensible move.

The incumbent Governor is a Democrat, unlikely to be challenged for a second term by his own party. A black Republican is still enough of a rarity to get attention for being a Republican. In addition, it is hard to tell

The Black Commentator – Freedom Rider: Lynn Swann and Black Republicans

the ambitious and unprincipled that they should stick with the loser Democrats.

Of course, Swann might be a true believer in the Republican agenda. Even so, it doesn't bode well for black Pennsylvanians.

Only registered Republicans will be able to vote for Swann in a Republican primary. That means he would win his party's nomination only by appealing to the political demands of conservative, white, high-income voters. In other words, he can't win if he addresses the needs of the black community.

For all of Swann's strengths, he still has the same disadvantages that burden every other black candidate for a statewide office. His pollsters will have to account for white people who will claim to support him but get cold feet upon entering a voting booth.

In addition, for all their talk about increasing support in the black community, the Republicans haven't really promoted any viable black candidates. Their goal in claiming they will reach out to black voters is more of a ploy to attract fence sitting white voters who like to pretend they are truly compassionate and conservative.

But they may be on to something. There may be enough black voters who will succumb to the siren song of race pride and vote for the guy who looks like them, especially if he is a celebrity. If a race is close, and enough black voters can be peeled away from the Democrat, Swann might be able to win.

Ironically, Swann does have a story to tell that would be of interest to black voters. In 1974 he was a star player at USC who was chosen as the Steelers first round draft pick. After celebrating his success with his brothers and a cousin he had an experience that made him a true brother with thousands of other black men.

San Francisco police stopped Swann and his party for going through a red light. A scuffle ensued, 11 officers in a total of five patrol cars were called to the scene, and the Swanns were all arrested and charged with assault. Eventually they were awarded damages, but so were the cops who countersued them.

If Republicans want to appeal to black voters they should start talking about the issues that matter to us, issues like police brutality. Instead of us trying to convince us that we don't need Social Security, or that we should admire Condi's war making abilities, why not promote a candidate because he was arrested for driving while black?

Swann should certainly give up lame statements like this: "We need to get over the issues of color and focus clearly on talent and work ethic. But we've been saying that since 1620." Swann was always talented and hard working, but it didn't prevent him from wrongly ending up in the long arms of the law just like his less fortunate brethren.

Swann will just repeat GOP talking points. Police misconduct is not on that list of issues. He certainly won't bring up the subject himself and if forced to discuss it will probably apologize for being mistreated. The incident certainly won't be mentioned in his stump speech.

Instead of a Democrat who takes black votes for granted, we are now seeing black Republicans who take our votes for granted. They think we won't care when they support policies the rest of us reject. Black Pennsylvanians should tell Swann they are grateful for the memories, but their politics won't change for the sake of his political ambitions.

*Margaret Kimberley's Freedom Rider column appears weekly in **BC**. Ms. Kimberley is a freelance writer living in New York City. She can be reached via e-Mail at margaret.kimberley@blackcommentator.com. You can read more of Ms. Kimberley's writings at freedomrider.blogspot.com.*