

Did you hear what was said at the NAACP?

Written by William Reed
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Mitt Romney's effort to win the support of the NAACP is an important strategy and speech that should not go unnoticed.

Amid all the reports and punditry that Gov. Romney received a hostile reception at the civil rights group's Houston conference, the standing ovation he received at the end of his speech has been largely overlooked by mainstream media. Since the Republicans' presumptive nominee made his appearance and speech to the NAACP, most likely you've heard that Romney was booed. But, what you may not have heard is that Romney left the stage to a standing ovation.

The mainstream media always seeks to set the tone of the discussion – suppose you owned a newspaper or were a news program host, which headline would you prefer: "NAACP Boos Romney during Speech about Obamacare" or "NAACP Convention Gives Romney Standing Ovation"? It's time to give Romney credit for going to the NAACP. He stood his ground and told the truth, something Obama has yet to do with Blacks. It's true he was booed at the mention of "Obamacare" and his intention to repeal the Affordable Care Act as a program he deems "too costly." It's likely that Romney knows the vast majority of Blacks support the nation's first African-American president and are favorably inclined toward his signature health care act.

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Romney has always said he would "repeal Obamacare." What needs to be discussed in public forums is the fact that Romney showed up and said: "If you want a president who will make things better in the African-American community, you are looking at him." He made the point that the economy is "worse for African Americans in almost every way. ... In June, while the overall unemployment rate remained stuck at 8.2 percent, the unemployment rate for African Americans actually went up to 14.4 percent." Romney said, "By any standard, African Americans ... do not appear to have advanced much toward steady jobs ... a serious argument could be made that they are falling behind. Equally disconcerting are the number of births to single African-American women, the incarceration rate for African-American men, the number of failing public schools that sustain the cycle of poverty and crime in disadvantaged communities and ... a dependence on taxpayer dollars."

Romney spoke to the NAACP of an economy that creates jobs, and of creating stronger families and more opportunities for all Americans. And, he endorsed school choice. But, it was NAACP President Ben Jealous who gave the media the negative spin, saying of Romney's speech: "He really wasn't trying to talk to them [the audience]. He was trying to talk to somebody else." He's right. Probably Romney was speaking to African Americans seeking jobs and better lives.

President Barack Obama did not make the NAACP convention, citing a scheduling conflict. If he had shown up, he might have had to face questions about his failure to deliver on his 2008 campaign promises. Instead, Vice President Joe Biden attended and imagined what a Romney Justice Department would look like. While the NAACP convention was an Obama/Biden "love fest", the nation's Black newspaper publishers were expressing anger and frustration at President Obama's failure to reach out to them or recognize their publications' audiences in productive ways. "We don't think the president has ever spoken to us. He's spoken to the Latino community and he's been specific," said Robert W. Bogle, publisher of the Philadelphia Tribune and a former [NNPA] president.

It's time for more balanced dialogue. Gov. Romney may want to use the rift between Black publishers and the Obama campaign to get his message out to Blacks. Sonny Messiah Jiles, publisher of the Houston Defender, comments apply equally to Obama or Romney: "We're trying to give you feedback ... and educate you on how to shape your message to our readers and their communities."

While Obama thinks that he's got the Black electorate "in his pocket" Romney may want to give a shout out to Ms. Jiles and the nation's 200 Black newspapers.

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