RELEASE: Caesar Rodney Institute

RE: Two Delawares

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As we move into election season, the competition for the vote of African-Americans in the state of Delaware becomes a point of constant attention and discussion. One major challenge to candidates is the notion that there is a "Black vote", i.e. one messaging strategy will resonate with the entire African-American electorate. We certainly know a few things. We know that a large portion of the African-American skews to the Democratic side of the aisle but many voters could not even tell you the voting record and social and cultural interests of the candidates.

Historically, there have been two blocks of African-American voters in Delaware - those who have found Delaware to be a land of economic and social opportunity and those who have not. For those folks Delaware is struggling to make ends meet on multiple low wage jobs (i.e. the bottom one-third of the income distribution) with limited benefits and lack of access to quality public education for their children, there may be a disconnect with legislators who are focused on transgender rights and global warming. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, while Ego, Family, and Self-Actualization needs are important, many are just wondering how they can feed their families and provide a safe place for their children to sleep.

The socioeconomic composition of Delaware's African-American community is rapidly changing and our citizens represent a substantive voting constituency. African-Americans are 22% of Delaware's citizens and, according to the Delaware Population Consortium, over the next five years Delaware's African-American population will rise 5.8% compared to just 0.6% for whites. In New Castle County, those projections show a rise of 5.5% compared to -1.0% for whites. Census data shows that, from 2000 to 2017, Delaware's African-American population increased by 50% while the number of African-Americans aged 25 and over with a bachelor's degree or higher rose 131%. The proportion of African-American adults with a college degree or higher went from 14% to 22% (as well as 24% in New Castle County). African-Americans went from constituting 10% to 14% of all Delaware adults with a BA+.

This is contrasted with folks who are struggling socio-economically. While the poverty rate of African-Americans in Delaware remains high at 19%, and more than one out of five Delaware African-American households receive food assistance, the last decade has also shown that the number of Delaware African-American households with income of $100 thousand or more has risen 66%.

Many politicians have dug their own grave by stereotyping issues like poverty, entitlements, and government assistance as "Black" issues. The days of spending on social programs as the main pendulum to capture the hearts and minds of African-American is ending. We are living in a state with more than 80% of African-American eighth graders in public school testing below proficient in reading and math for 20 years. As a parent myself, I need to know that our elected officials are not merely marketing to me because of my color, but because of my interests and values. And for those families who are enduring hard socio-economic times, they deserve to know what the legislature is doing to support their families. In a world where an African-American family should have all of the opportunities of a white family, we need to understand how long-standing, imbedded cultural forces are being systematically chipped away by our representatives in Dover to provide a more equitable lifestyle for all

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