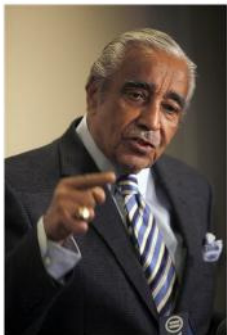


NEW POLITICAL DISPENSATION IN HARLEM!

Essay by: Gary James



The anticlimactic ending of the U.S. House of Representatives Ethics Committee investigation of veteran Congressman Charles Rangel, that resulted in him (Rangel) being censured by his congressional peers and humiliated in the public eye, is without question a game changing event in the politics of Harlem, going forward. The end of the forty-year legislative career of the Dean of New York's Congressional delegation is being lived out and the political climax may be lurking in the Presidential election of 2012. While the answer to the political question of, will he or won't he, is the subject of great speculation, congressman Rangel will have the definitive last word on that, in due course... But, despite the question of whether Congressman Rangel is in the 2012 race or not, it is a foregone conclusion that electoral politics in Harlem is entering a new and dynamic dispensation.



Needless to say, sometime in the near future, the octogenarian Congressman would hang-up his reelection campaign running shoes. Congressman Charles Rangel is the last elected official personality representing Harlem's famous political "old guard." That high point period in Harlem's contemporary political past that was punctuated by the late Honorable Percy Sutton, affectionately known as the "chairman" and his close political colleague, the honorable Basil Patterson.

In addition to Congressman Rangel, Percy Sutton, and Basil Patterson embody the twentieth century Harlem political legacy. The honorable Mayor David Dinkins was also a part of that elite political group, and they were referred to in various quarters as, the "gang of four." These iconic African American contemporary political figures stand on the shoulders of the late

and great Rev. (Dr.) Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and other storied political African American figures like Honorable, J. Raymond Jones, a/k/a, the Harlem Fox, among others. However, there are apparently, no political heirs to perpetuate Harlem, as the black political leadership model in twenty first century electoral politics. Hence, we may be witnessing a new political dispensation emerging in Harlem.



While it remains to be seen whether Congressman Rangel will run for reelection for the 20th time in 2012, many speculate that the next congressperson in the 15th congressional district will not be a black American. Some suggest that political maverick, State Senator William Perkins would be a strong candidate to succeed Congressman Rangel, but it is not likely that he (Perkins) would receive the blessing from Rangel should he (Rangel) chose not to run for reelection in 2012. A few political analysts suggest that Rangel would be inclined to endorse former Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields to succeed him when he ultimately chooses not to run for another term. In any case, there will most likely be multiple seekers to Harlem's coveted congressional thrown in 2012, despite Rangel's decision one way or the other.

Needless to say, Governor, David Patterson, the son of the Honorable Basil Patterson, and Democratic County leader of Manhattan, the Honorable Keith Wright, the son of famed Justice, Bruce Wright, will likely not be included among the field of freshman congressional aspirants.



Additionally, Gov. Patterson and county leader Wright are not disposed to supporting Senator Perkins if he chooses to seek the congressional seat on his own, because of the political rupture between them. In the 2010 election both Patterson and Wright supported the candidate running against Senator Perkins, and he was soundly thrashed by Perkins, as he, (Perkins) racked up the most votes in comparison to all other winning candidates in

Harlem. Apart from the personal political animas that characterizes the political none relationship between the three (3) parties mentioned, Perkins defied the New York political delegation during the 2008 presidential primary. Perkins supported the candidacy of Senator Barack Obama in the party primary, while all other black elected officials in Harlem threw their support behind Senator Hillary Clinton.

Given the current political circumstances the 2012 presidential election portends unusually interesting along with far reaching political scenarios. But in terms of the political facts on the ground, the ball remains in the congressman's court and it's up to him how he plays the process. Whether Rangel will or won't seek another term is an open question at this point and political speculation is high on either side of the question. Whatever the congressman's ultimate decision is, it will be politically consequential as it will set in both political parties in motion to kick-off the second decade of the 21st century in political terms.

During the forty year reign of the veteran Democratic Party congressional leader, the honorable congressman was a tireless





opponent of the Republican Party's policy initiatives and he, (Rangel) was well known for vociferously challenging his GOP congressional counterparts. In this context Rangel earned the nick-name Republican Party basher. The congressman relished in his political nick-name in the company of his partisan rank and file, as he extolled the popular partisan rhetoric, and the popular political friends verses political enemies juxtapositions. But interestingly enough, behind the political facade the congressman was engaged in sophisticated electoral politics with the New York County Republican Party leadership.

As the result of sophisticated political power relationships, Congressman Rangel has never had to contend with a serious electoral challenge from his Republican Party political opposition. As a consequence of this esoteric political arrangement Rangel only had to be concerned about electoral challenges from within the Democratic Party. Now, forty years hence we find that there has never been a viable candidate from either political party, Democratic or Republican, capable of successfully challenging his power relationships across party lines. Rangel's four plus decades in Congress amounted to a political cake walk... Following the electoral defeat of Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr., by Congressman Charles Rangel in 1970, Rangel enjoyed a strange

political bedfellow relationship with the local Republican Party leadership, a virtual political quid pro quo arrangement.

Following congressman Rangel's defeat of incumbent congressman Powell in 1970, Rangel had the benefit of running on the Republican Party line for more than two-thirds of his reelection contests. It was during the year 2000 that it began to be rhetorically a politically untenable position for Rangel as well



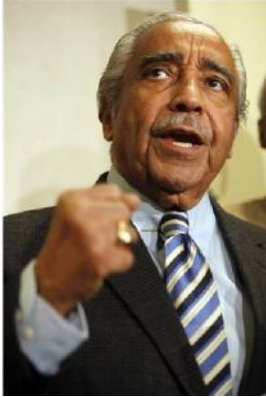
as the local GOP to maintain. Since then, the Republican Party simply ran a political fall-guy as the GOP candidate for congress, against Rangel. Hence, the uncontested political power that Congressman Rangel enjoys currently in both Democratic and Republican Parties remains in place, substantially without a credible challenge.

On the other side of the political aisle, there was no viable electoral challenge by the emerging black Democratic Party electoral leadership for the coveted GOP elected seats, in the New York State Assembly, and Senate, the and congress in particular. The sophisticated strange political bedfellow arrangement protected the political flanks of the respective partisan opposition, therefore electoral



leadership battles were confined to internal political struggles, within both Democratic and Republican political parties. The community at large has been locked out, and the black community in particular has been effectively locked out of the Democratic and Republican Parties.

Congressman Rangel by way of the "old guard" maintain virtual control of black politics in Harlem and New York City



until the mid 1980s when the black leadership based in Brooklyn, effectively emerged as the new black political “vanguard” and challenged the heretofore monopoly that the Harlem leadership contingent had on politics in the city. Notwithstanding the emergence of the Brooklyn based vanguard, Harlem, vis-à-vis, Congressman Rangel and his gang of four, managed to maintain a political edge as a result of their experience in deploying political machinations, and sophisticated political destabilizing tactics.

In the balance, the black American community in New York City at large was politically locked into the Democratic Party, while simultaneously being locked out of overall electoral political process. For example, the Democratic Party leadership, which includes virtually all “black political leaders” essentially control and manage the ballot access and primary election process. Therefore, emerging political aspirants must go through the trail established **by** the leadership in order to play in the electoral process. However, on rare occasions, emerging political aspirants are able to access the necessary information and to qualify as a candidate for political office, despite the tricks designed to make ballot access, a political obstacle course.

Congressman Rangel’s campaign has never resorted to ballot access tactics in order to thwart a potential candidacy of an opponent, as there was never a hint of

a viable opponent to face-off with him. Although the political machine that he and his gang members control has a colorful record of successfully cutting political insurgents off at the pass, and running down field interference. Former City Councilman, Hilton Clarke in the early 1980s was able to successfully hurdle the ballot access political booby traps of the old guard, and ultimately win the seat the late Howard Samuels. But the



Harlem political machine ultimately caught up with Clarke and he was defeated by former C. Virginia Fields, who later served as the Borough President of Manhattan. Rangel enjoys the status of the Dean of black politics in New York, despite his current political travails. But the congressman’s political travails remind us of the vicissitudes that accompany the passing of decades of time, exacts a toll... As a matter of fact the Congressman’s issues with the US House of Representatives Ethics Committee may have a correlation with the carelessness and neglect that accompanies unchallenged political leadership, and the prospects of honorable longevity.

History will ultimately issue its judgment on the political career of the titular head of black politics in



Harlem, and dean of the New York Congressional delegation, and stalwart of the storied Harlem black Democratic leadership cadre. When the honorable congressman Rangel is no longer on the political scene there be an obvious political vacuum, and it will effectively end the “old guards” dominance of Harlem politics in particular, and black politics in New York in general. The form that black American politics will take in Harlem and New York City going forward is anybody’s guess.



It is also anybody's guess as to whether 2012, will begin the post Rangel political dispensation.

The political foot print of Congressman Rangel is so large that it has impacted the New York Republican County committee over the past forty years. During this period, the Rangel impact has helped to fashion the way GOP political business has been conducted in Harlem, which continues. The "Harlem"

Republican Party political business model was also employed in New York City, and other relevant counties in the state. While Rangel and company managed black political leadership aspirations in the Democratic Party, the Harlem GOP model hand-picked black Republican district leaders and deployed them as political gatekeepers, to hold local organic community leadership back, and / or run down field political interference when required, to thwart black political insurgents.

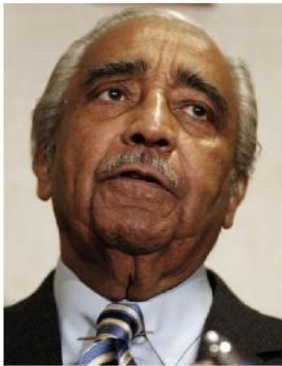
With hand-picked Republican Party designated leaders in place, the local GOP was more often than not able to avoid the party primary election, which could potentially change the district leadership landscape, and upset the established political order. But the black political gate keepers remained beholding to their anointers, plus they (designated political leaders) had no independent knowledge of the complete petitioning and primary election process. Therefore, political insurgents could not emerge to challenge the appointed black leadership because information concerning the how-to of the process was tightly held in Republican quarters.

On the other hand, blacks in the Democratic Party learned about the primary election process and basic voter education and application strategies as a by-product of the civil rights movement during the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, during the civil rights days the political narrative was that the Republican Party was reactionary, and must be avoided like a political plague.

Hence all of the community political activism was directed to, and at, the Democratic Party. In New York City in particular the Republican Party leadership became complacent with inactivity during the 1960s and 1970s, while the Democratic Party became animated by increasing numbers and community activism.

Black political activism was confined to the Democratic Party, and the hand-picked Negroes that fronted as

GOP districted leaders kept the party's image palatable during and post civil rights, by the use of black GOP cameo photo shots.



Moreover, the Congressman Rangel strange bedfellow political relationship in conjunction with the anointed black GOP political gate keepers, such as Mr. Fred Brown, a Bronx district leader and former chairman of the National Black Republican Council (NBRC) and president of the New York Council of Black Republicans, have managed to modulate the legitimate political aspirations of emerging organic local political leadership. In the balance, the Republican Party district leader infrastructure is either melted down or nonexistent in the city and state as we speak...





The essentially handed-picked black Republican district leaders in the respective boroughs enabled the white GOP political masters during the 1960s, 70s and early 80s to keep a potential black community GOP political activism at bay. But the Republican Party's political ambivalence to the black community at large made it vulnerable to attack from its right political flank and ripe for an ideological takeover from the conservative wing of the party. This process was initiated formally in 1980, when the incumbent Republican US Senator from New York, the honorable Jacob Javitz, a "liberal" Republican, lost to the conservative party insurgent Senator Alphonse D'Amato. The Conservative Party has made steady progress since then and currently the right wing of the party practically controls the GOP in the city and state.

The conservative wing of the Republican Party has enjoyed control of the national party in the wake of the civil rights legislation of the mid 1960s, and according to some readers of "tea leaves" the Tea Party is tilting the political cup and it appears that political spillage is a foregone conclusion, going forward. Notwithstanding the other political factors that may be relevant to the current state of affairs in the local and national Republican Party, a monumental internal political dual seems to be unfolding for the 2012 presidential election.

There are internal political dynamics percolating just beneath the surface of both the Democratic and Republican Parties, and Congressman Rangel will be politically consequential on each side of the political aisle whether he decides to run again, or not. While the relevant Democratic Party's stakeholders and respective role players must ultimately and respectfully await the for final decision



of their politically weakened senior leader, the Harlem Republican party grassroots leadership appears to be formulating a local political initiative for 2012, that may be politically synergistic with others.

Ms. Keisha Morrissey, a former Republican Party candidate in 2002 for the New York State Assembly in the 70th AD, and candidate for the New York City Council in the 29th CD in 2003, has been focused on her career as a public relations and marketing entrepreneur in the fighting sports industry said, "although I am watching local politics from a safe distance, my running shoes still fit and they feel good. My political options remain open, but competing for public office is not the only way that I can see myself participating in the political game in the future. "



The main challenge to political growth in the local GOP is the lack of a strong district leadership presence in the various boroughs of the city. In Harlem for example, the New York Republican County Committee leaders are lackluster political veterans of the weakened political party status quo. The only apparent glimmer of political hope going forward is the prospect that the legitimately elected District Leader in Harlem's 70th AD, Ms. Denise Johns, is able to build on the inroads she has made. Should the

new leader navigate the political learning curve and approach the party building process with the benefit of proven expertise, or will she be consumed by the political machinations of the clubhouse gang, who have little if any party building skills. Ms. Johns ran a successful insurgent campaign against Mr. Will Brown, a favorite son of the former GOP county leadership, and soundly defeated Mr. Brown. Johns is facing reelection in September of 2011 and many are supporting her reelection and party building undertakings.

There is indeed political irony associated with this, the closing chapter of Congressman's Rangel's colorful four decades long career as an elected official. In addition, he is a politically consequential figure in the annals of Harlem's political fame and as well as its political infamy. While his political footprint covers the last forty years, with his currently political positioning, Rangel's political exit strategy may leave his fingerprint on Harlem politics going forward for the next forty years...

RELEVANT LINKS:

Harlem Politics, Fame and Infamy...

<http://www.harlemweekly.com/?p=474>

Can Cong. Rangel & Gov. Paterson Survive?

<http://www.blackpt.org/?p=311>

Harlem Political Leaders Pow-wow!

<http://www.blackpt.org/?p=297>

Race Based Political Hustle...

<http://wp.me/pDSzo-2O>

Debating the Black Agenda...

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