

A lot of people are quick to disclaim presidential candidate Herman Cain as a natural Black or African American simply because of his conservative, pro-business views. It really puzzles me how people think political persuasion identifies your race. The founder of the Republican Party, Frederick Douglass, was indeed Black. The “Father of Black Economic Empowerment”, Booker T. Washington, was also very much Black. Republican President Richard M. Nixon got 38% of the Black vote –yes, they were really Black. Let’s take a good look at Herman Cain and determine if there is anything to dispel his Black appearance.

Mr. Cain was born in Memphis, Tennessee on December 13, 1945. These were serious Jim Crow times in a very segregated South. His mother was a cleaning woman and domestic worker – just like my mother. His father was born on a farm and worked as a barber, janitor and as a chauffeur. These were humble Black roots for Mr. Cain but they were also proud roots. His forefathers were slaves – just like mine.

His family (parents and brother) soon moved to Atlanta and settled initially in The Bluff area. His father’s proudest moment came when he and his wife saved enough money to buy their first home in Collier Heights. Herman grew up in the Black side of Atlanta never doubting his blackness and pure African American roots. He graduated from Archer public school in 1963 and proudly began his matriculation through Morehouse College. He graduated from this Black institution in 1968. He soon married his wife Gloria who recently graduated from another renown Black institution, Morris Brown College. Her career includes being a teacher and librarian.

His family (wife, son and daughter) have lived a productive life in Atlanta and never forgetting that they are indeed descendents of the African American experience in America, replete with slavery, struggle, discrimination and obstacles not sustained by any other people on earth. They know it but still they rise! Much of their strength is gathered in their membership in Antioch Baptist Church right there in inner city Atlanta. Mrs. Cain sings in the choir while Herman is one of the associate ministers. He has been a member of the church since he was ten years old. Antioch is part of the National Baptist Convention, USA. It doesn’t get any blacker than that.

His bachelor’s degree at Morehouse was in mathematics and he began his career as a ballistics analyst for the U.S. Department of Navy (civilian GS schedule). While working there he went through a graduate program in computer science at Purdue University and received his master’s degree. He then leveraged his master’s degree to begin his corporate career starting with The Coca-Cola Company in Atlanta as a computer systems analyst. Ironically, one of the chauffeur jobs his father had was for the President of Coca Cola – only in America!

His other corporate experience would be of many accomplishments with Pillsbury where he had key management positions with their Burger King subsidiary and then with its Godfather's Pizza subsidiary. It was here where he began his notoriety as his successes at both places became legendary. Never, not once, did this child of the Jim Crow South forget his roots. Eventually, he and a group of investors bought Godfather's from Pillsbury and it became more successful. He moved to Omaha, NE where it was based. This shocked the business world. This newly established magnate was Black and would never let you mistake him for anything else. Herman Cain – strong, proud and black to the “bone”- his story continues.

Herman learned much about banking by becoming the Deputy Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City and eventually became the Chairman. He has also done a stint as CEO of the mighty National Restaurant Association which gave him experience with lobbying in Washington, DC and an understanding of politics at the national level. After that he moved back to Atlanta. This career is phenomenal. The frosting on the cake is that it belongs to a proud Black man.

I first heard Herman Cain speak in 1989. A Black social service group I belonged to at the time, International Frontiers, was having its annual convention in Omaha, NE. They proudly introduced him as the Godfather of Black Business in Omaha. He wore that mantle proudly and spoke to us about Black economic empowerment via self-determination (just like Booker T. Washington). I became impressed then and that hasn't changed since.

Herman Cain is now running for President of the United States. If elected, he will be the first president to come from African American (descendants of slaves) heritage. The first to grow up in and during the Jim Crow South. The first to be a graduate of an HBCU and a lifelong member of a black Baptist church. Is Herman Cain black? He is black to the “bone”. It doesn't get blacker!

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