

GETTING OUT THE DEMOCRATIC VOTE-AT THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

I spent four hours doing GOTV in Jackson, Michigan today. Like Battle Creek, Democratic voters in Jackson will support both Blue America-endorsed congressional candidate Mark Schauer and Barack Obama. Like Battle Creek, Jackson is a predominantly working class small city that has suffered economically under George Bush—though there were a lot more union folks out helping on GOTV and a lot of positive energy in the campaign office.

But doing GOTV in Jackson was an extra special treat for me. It is (arguably) the birthplace of the Republican party.

After finishing my walk sheets, I went to the site of the meeting at which, in 1854, a bunch of abolitionists put together a slate of voters and called themselves "republicans"—called "Under the Oaks." Here's what the plaque at the site reads:

Under the Oaks

On July 6, 1854, a state convention of anti-slavery men was held in Jackson to found a new political party. Uncle Tom's Cabin had been published two years earlier, causing increased resentment against slavery, and the Kansas-Nebraska act of 1854, threatened to make slave states out of previous free territories. Since the convention day was hot and the huge crowd could not be accommodated in the hall, the meeting adjourned to an oak grove on "Morgan's Forty" on the outskirts of the town. Here a state-wide slate of candidates was selected, and the Republican party was born. Winning

an overwhelming victory in 1854, the Republican party went on to dominate national politics throughout the nineteenth century.

Funny—the historian who wrote the plaque didn't have much to say about the Republican party's legacy in the twentieth century (the park was founded in 1987, so the historian can be forgiven for his or her silence about what the Republican party has become in the twenty-first century!). As today's Republican Party dumps millions into ads that use race to divide the country I couldn't help but see the irony. Now, as their party desperately attempts to stave off a historic rebuke, race seems to be all it has left. Only look what those race politics have become.

Which is why it was so cool to GOTV in Jackson. After all, if Obama wins on Tuesday, it'll do so much to fulfill the legacy of the Republican party that gathered in Jackson in 1854. May the Midwest once again lead the country away from its terrible legacy of slavery and racism.