

# OPINION

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## A Second Try at Rebuilding Our Nation

We must learn from the past

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Many of us have been thrilled by the video of 106-year-old mentor and school volunteer Mrs. Virginia McLaurin visiting the White House during a Black History Month celebration to meet — and dance with — President and Mrs. Obama. Her joy in being there and fulfilling her dream of meeting the first African-American President and First Lady was infectious. Born a child of South Carolina sharecroppers in 1909, this was a day she never dreamed would come: “I didn’t think I’d ever live to see a colored president. I am so happy.”

Moments like these give us a chance to appreciate how much change a citizen like Mrs. McLaurin has seen in her lifetime. When she was born America was firmly in the grip of Jim Crow, segregation, racial violence and political disenfranchisement that characterized the decades following the initial post-Civil War promise of Reconstruction.

She moved to Washington, D.C. in 1941, in time to see the activism of A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin and others urging

the federal government to desegregate our armed forces and provide more economic opportunity for African-Americans. She saw burgeoning civil rights activities like these surge into a transforming movement across the South including the 1963 March on Washington in her new hometown. And she saw the Civil Rights Movement lead to significant



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changes — enough to allow her to visit President and Mrs. Obama in the White House in 2016.

When we look at arcs of history like this, where are we today? Many scholars see the Civil Rights Movement as a second Reconstruction Era and a second try at rebuilding our nation into one truly committed to liberty and justice for all. But just as the progress of the first Reconstruction was followed by decades of retrenchment and reversal, many of the formidable threats millions of poor chil-

dren and families of all races but especially children of color face today are very dangerous steps backwards.

Unjust racial profiling and killing of Black boys and men by law enforcement officers enjoined to protect them; mass incarceration of people of color — especially Black males; massive attacks on voting rights which especially impact the poor, people of color, the elderly, disabled and the young;

and resegregating and substandard schools denying millions of poor Black, Latino and Native American children basic literacy, numeracy and other skills they will need to work in our increasingly competitive globalized economy should be siren calls to wake up and fight back.

Past lessons have led some scholars and observers to believe we may be in a second post-Reconstruction Era, fighting deliberate widespread well-funded regression and backlash against

progress made. But Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, the head of North Carolina’s NAACP chapter and a leader in the “Moral Mondays” movement, views this historical moment with optimism but urges vigilance. In his new book with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement*, Dr. Barber argues that the beginnings of a Third

Reconstruction are underway—rooted in “fusion politics” that have changed our nation before and can do it again.

The multifaith, multiracial movement is committed to a 14-point People’s Agenda including education, health care, the economy and reforming the justice and electoral systems, and is supported by over 150 coalition partners.

When Dr. Barber spoke to a group of young leaders at a Children’s Defense Fund event

last June, he explained why he believes multiracial, multifaith, nonviolent coalitions are essential right now: “So what many extremists are trying to do is abort the third reconstruction. That’s why they are telling America this myth . . . You want a great America? Deny public education, deny health care, deny living wages, deny labor rights. You really, really want a great America? Deny immigrant rights. Deny LGBTQ rights. Deny women’s rights. You really want a great America? Deny the right to vote. You really want a great America? Turn everybody against everybody. Pit Muslims against Christians and women against men. Call the president everything you can but a child of God . . . And if you really, really, really, really want a great America, make sure that people can get a gun quicker than they can vote. . . . And I stopped by to tell you that in this moment we better know who we are and where we are, and that in this moment of a possible third reconstruction we are called to speak truth in times like these.”

It is our time. We must all learn from the past to end another era of backlash and backsliding and keep moving forward together.

*Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children’s Defense Fund.*

## Donald Trump — From One Tyrant to Another

Using power to stay in power

BY MEL GURTOV

One thing I discovered long ago about tyrants: they love other tyrants. They’re a mutual admi-

ration/suffering society. When one succeeds by extinguishing dissent, the others applaud; and when one falls, the others cringe.

Donald Trump is a tyrant in thin disguise. He’s always talking about the people who have the least interest in sup-

porting him as though they really love him. Mexicans “love me,” he says; so do Indians, Jews, non-terrorist Muslims, Chinese, Russians, Japanese, Germans. In fact, Trump will unify them all, he promises. Of course they mostly loathe him, just as Trump loathes all of them, as well as many other non-white groups.

What is most revealing, however, are the people Trump admires, such as Vladimir Putin, Saddam Hussein, and Moammar Qaddafi—dictators who, Trump has said, know how to eliminate troublemakers and terrorists. Sure they kill lots of innocent people, but you have to admire their grit.

What Trump specifically admires about tyrants is their willingness to use their power to stay in power. Putin, for instance, wins Trump’s applause for dealing decisively with ethnic dissenters, critical journalists, and uncooperative businesspeople — and he evidently sees in

Trump his mirror image. Thus as president Trump thinks he would be able to strike a deal with Putin, since tough guys speak the same language. Trump must surely have laughed at George W. Bush for believing that he had looked into Putin’s “soul” and found something likeable and trustworthy.

The same goes for China’s leaders, whom Trump otherwise detests and is sure he can outsmart. They have his admiration for cracking down on protesters at Tiananmen in 1989. He once told an interviewer: “the Chinese government almost blew it. Then they were vicious, they were horrible, but they put it down with strength. That shows you the power of strength.”

Looking into Trump’s soul, we see a truly authoritarian personality, someone who will bring the same no-nonsense skills he applies in the business world to the White House. As president, Trump can be expected to keep

his own counsel, downgrade expertise, issue orders without consultation, ignore Congress and the law, recklessly conduct foreign affairs, and pay no heed to minorities, women, unions, the press, NGOs, Democrats, and (oh yes) most Republicans. He will insult people willy-nilly and humiliate anyone who gets in his way. He will attack every criticism as a lie, but have no compunctions about lying to push across his ideas. His every audacious act will be carried out in the name of restoring American strength after decades of weakness.

The worst of it all is that for perhaps one-third of the American electorate, and perhaps more, this description of Donald Trump is very appealing. But I remain convinced that, like the tyrants he admires, Trump will fall.

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