

# OPINION

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to [news@portlandobserver.com](mailto:news@portlandobserver.com).

## The Unfulfilled Power of the Black Vote

### Changing the political landscape

BY DR. RON DANIELS

For decades I have been hammering home the point that in a low voter participation environment, the group that effectively educates, mobilizes and organizes its voters to turn-out on election day will wield power disproportionate to its numbers in the overall electorate. Put another way, a relatively small group that registers and turns out a high percentage of its potential voters will exercise greater influence than a much larger group that fails to register and turn-out a high percentage of its potential voters. This is a Daniels political axiom. And, as Frank Watkins, advisor to Rev. Jesse Jackson puts it, “an organized minority is a political majority.”

The United States has the low-



est voter participation rate of any of the western democracies. I have suggested somewhat facetiously that the biggest political party in the U.S. is not the Democrats or Republicans but non-voters. A voter turn-out in this country in the range of 50-55 percent of the eligible electorate is hailed by political commentators as spectacular. This is absolutely abysmal when compared to western democracies where voter turn-out is routinely 80 percent or better. But, the reality of this low voter participation environment creates a major opportunity for black voters to exercise power disproportionate to our numbers in the electorate. It is not by accident that Republicans are openly implementing policies to suppress or disenfranchise black voters. The forces of reaction realize that if blacks maximize voter registration and mobilize/organize large voter turn-outs, it is a threat to their retrograde agenda.

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson has relentlessly urged black folks to register and vote in massive num-

bers to maximize our political power. He recently shared data that illuminates the unfulfilled power of the black vote, noting that there are still 8 million blacks who are not registered to vote, 4 million in the South. Rev. Jackson’s point is that a potent key to political resistance and transformation is in black hands, the ballot. The challenge is to organize/mobilize and turn-out the unorganized, black people who, for whatever reason, do not believe that voting matters as a means of changing their lives.

There is increasing evidence that a new generation of black leaders, particularly women and young people, understand the potential of the black vote as foundational to coalitions that can beat back the conservative tide of Trumpism by advancing people-centered, progressive policies.

Stacey Abrams has an excellent chance to become the first black Governor of Georgia by educating and inspiring hundreds of thousands of unregistered, “improbable” black voters to register

and turn-out in massive numbers on election day. Ben Jealous has launched a grassroots campaign to employ the same formula in Maryland. The polls in Boston showed Ayanna Pressley trailing long term Congressman Michael Capuano by 10 points among “probable” voters in the Democratic Primary. She won by more than 10 points because she organized/mobilized the unorganized; the improbable voters showed up in massive numbers as the anchor of her progressive coalition.

Rev. Jackson points out that in Florida Andrew Gillum, who shocked the pundits by winning the Democratic primary for Governor, can win because there are more than 1.8 million blacks who are eligible to register in that state coupled with more than 300,000 recently arrived Puerto Ricans who fled the Island in the wake of Hurricane Maria. When the improbable voters from these constituencies are energized to march on the ballot box, there is a very high probability that Gillum will become the first African

American Governor of Florida.

In a low voter participation environment, where large numbers of whites will remain unregistered or will not vote, all that is required is for the unorganized, the improbable voters in the black community and our allies to mobilize/organize and turn-out in massive numbers to achieve victory!

So, the mandate is clear; Black leaders must devise strategies to educate, motivate, inspire and energize millions of unregistered, improbable black voters to burst into the arena to become the cornerstone of progressive coalitions. These coalitions of the improbable have the potential to fundamentally alter the political landscape in the U.S. by ushering in an era of resistance to Trumpism and more importantly advancing progressive policies which can create a new America!

*Dr. Ron Daniels is President of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century and Distinguished Lecturer Emeritus, York College City University of New York.*

## End Cruelty to Immigrant Families and Children

### It will take all of us protesting together

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

July 26 was the deadline set by a court for the Trump administration to reunite all children and parents who were cruelly separated from each other at the border by their zero-tolerance immigration policy. Yet we enter October with about 400 children still separated from their families.

Nearly two-thirds of these children’s parents have reportedly already been deported without being reunited with their children. Immigrant advocates say some migrant parents agreed to be deported quickly with the understanding that it would speed up their ability to recover their children—but did not understand that they would be leaving their children behind. One father from Honduras who was deported without his 11-year-old son told a reporter he believed that was the only way to be reunited with his child: “They told me, ‘He’s ahead of you’. . . It was a lie.”

These are not the only families being threatened and torn apart by current cruel Trump adminis-

tration immigration policies. We must add all of the families broken up every day by deportation actions; the more than 270,000 U.S.-born children threatened with separation if President Trump revokes Temporary Protected Status for Haitians, Salvadorans and Hondurans in 2019; and the uncertainty still hanging over those, some with young children, who have received temporary immigration benefits through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and other Dreamers.

The Department of Health and Human Services reported last month that there are 12,800 migrant children who came across the border alone who are still detained rather than placed with family members or sponsors, a five-fold increase from a year ago. This is dramatically straining the capacity of existing shelters and depriving these vulnerable children and youths of crucial supportive human connections. One likely reason for this increase is that sponsors are more reluctant to come forward to care for these unaccompanied minors given the anti-immigrant actions of the Trump

administration.

As if these earlier horrors of the administration’s anti-immigrant agenda were not enough, the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services recently proposed to remove the 20-day limit on detention of children with their families established under the 1997 Flores court ruling, which would allow children and families to be placed in indefinite detention in unlicensed facilities.

And the administration is ex-

pected to soon propose for comment harmful and radical revisions to the “public charge” regulation that would allow the Department of Homeland Security to deny green cards and visas to immigrants who receive one or more public benefits, such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), housing vouchers and others. The threat of

the new much broader definition of “public charge” is already causing immigrant families not to apply for the benefits they and their children need to survive. What is wrong with us? As we continue to fight for parents and children separated at the border to be reunified and for children crossing alone to be treated humanely, we must intensify the call of all major faiths to protect children and welcome the stranger. It will take all of us protesting

fense Fund and many others at the community, state and national levels to resist policies that tear children apart from families and threaten those who are undocumented, those with Temporary Protected Status, those with DACA and other Dreamers, and those seeking green cards and visas.

In your local community you can help address the immediate needs of immigrants by supporting service programs providing them needed help, offering refuge and sanctuary, and protesting cruel and harmful practices. Please reach out and support those aiding children and families at the border. At the national level, please join those who will comment on the harmful proposed regulations designed to deny children in detention basic protections and threaten basic survival benefits for children and families with changes to the “public charge” rules.

About one in four children in our country has an immigrant parent. This urgent child and family tragedy is an attack on children, on immigrant families and on the moral decency of our nation—and it is far from over. Please stay vigilant, stand up and speak out.

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

*It will take all of us protesting together against the Trump administration’s cruel and immoral zero-tolerance immigration policies...*

pected to soon propose for comment harmful and radical revisions to the “public charge” regulation that would allow the Department of Homeland Security to deny green cards and visas to immigrants who receive one or more public benefits, such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), housing vouchers and others. The threat of

together against the Trump administration’s cruel and immoral zero-tolerance immigration policies, the evil separation of immigrant children from their families, and efforts to detain and cut back protections for immigrant families and children.

For all people of conscience ready to act—you are not alone. You can join the Children’s De-