

OPINION

Every Child Deserves a Quality Education

Staying vigilant on Brown

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

As a teenager, many of Barbara Johns' wildest dreams were about a surprising subject: A new school. Then a day came when the 16-year-old decided to put her dreams into action.

"It was time that Negroes were treated equally with whites, time that they had a decent school, time for the students themselves to do something about it," she recalled.

The year was 1951 and Barbara was at segregated Robert R. Moton High School in Prince Edward County, Va. As her sister Joan remembered, "Most of the school supplies that we got were torn and tattered, and we didn't have enough supplies to write with. The school we went to was overcrowded. Consequently, the county decided to build three tar paper shacks for us to hold classes in. A tar paper



shack looks like a dilapidated black building, which is similar to a chicken coop on a farm... It was a very difficult setting for trying to learn."

Barbara organized and led 400 students in a strike to protest the school's terrible conditions and demand facilities more like the county's white high school.

NAACP attorneys Spottwood Robinson and Oliver Hill became involved after Barbara's persistent calls to their Richmond office, and after the students agreed they were willing to fight for a desegregated school rather than just a better segregated one.

The legal case against the Prince Edward County school board was ultimately bundled with four similar cases by NAACP attorneys in *Brown vs. Board of Education et al.*, leading to the landmark Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public schools 65 years ago.

But the triumph of Brown was sadly not the end of the story for black children in Prince Edward County. In-

stead of complying with the Supreme Court decision, the commonwealth of Virginia pursued a campaign of "massive resistance," enacting a variety of new laws and policies designed to prevent public school desegregation.

While other districts eventually gave in, Prince Edward County's Board of Supervisors continued to refuse to desegregate their schools and instead voted in June 1959 to shut down the county's entire public school system. It took five years and another Supreme Court decision to finally force the county to reopen its public schools.

And the triumph of Brown is still incomplete—and in renewed danger—for millions of students across our nation right now. The struggle for a quality education for every child is still the unfinished business of the Civil Rights Movement and the promise of ending "separate and unequal" schools has not yet been realized.

Sixty-five years after Brown, many of the 58 percent of black students and 60 percent of Hispanic students who still attend predomi-

nantly segregated schools—where 75 percent or more of their peers are minorities—continue to endure inadequate schools, missing supplies, and too many teachers with low expectations for them. Instead of moving to address our nation's ongoing need to live up to Brown the current Administration is choosing executive and judicial nominees and pursuing regulatory changes all moving in the opposite direction.

Sherrilyn Ifill, president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, writes in a recent op-ed for the Washington Post: "Since April 2018, more than two dozen executive and judicial nominees have declined to endorse the Supreme Court's unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. This week — one that marks the 65th anniversary of the landmark ruling that struck down legal apartheid in this country — the Senate is poised to confirm three of those judicial nominees to lifetime seats on the federal bench. That is simply unacceptable... The ugly truth is that declining to offer ap-

proval of Brown signals a willingness to question the project of democracy that Brown created — one in which African Americans and other marginalized groups compelled the federal courts to honor the spirit of equal justice embodied in the words of the 14th Amendment. And this isn't just deeply troubling; it's also downright dangerous."

Barbara Johns' courageous decision to do something about the injustice she saw around her helped change history just like the brave actions of so many other children, youths, and adults during the Civil Rights Movement. But we will not see continued progress unless we remain aware of all current threats and ready to meet today's insidious attempts at "massive resistance" with a mightier moral resistance of our own. In this evil climate we must be more vigilant than ever to make sure that we keep moving forward, not backwards.

Marian Wright Edelman is founder and president emerita of the Children's Defense Fund.

No More Waiting on the Call for Reparations

A burden black people can no longer endure

BY TOLSON BANNER

Have you ever been caught in the middle of "sumptin" where it seemed as if there was no way out? Like table tennis, you are "pinged and ponged" between two opposing forces: red and blue states. Incessantly, you are slammed into the net because neither side is willing to reconcile the dichotomy of America's ongoing white tribal war: benign neglect by Democrat liberals and recalcitrance by Republican conservatives. Malcolm X referred to this as the fox or the wolf for black people. This is the nature of reparations where white people are either asking black people to be patient like the Biblical Job or resign ourselves to the waiting room, get in line, take a ticket and listen out for their number (untold millions of Africans who died, as well as, those who were enslaved during the Christian/Atlantic enslavement trade) - which to this day has never been called. No reconciliation; no atonement; and no ealing.

This constant request from white people (some blacks as well) to be patient and wait are the critical reasons why Martin Luther King Jr. wrote the book *Why We Can't Wait*. King laid out several reasons to make his case during the tumultuous 60's. Those same reasons are applicable today for black people: disillusionment with the



way justice is served up for black people; lack of confidence in politicians and the government; decolonization of Africa (today neo-colonialism); living out the true meaning of the Emancipation Proclamation; and economic inequality.

Even before the news pundits pontificate and before election gurus peer into their crystal balls, Presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders with his echo chamber renowned scholar, Cornel West have already told black people to forget about having reparations as part of Sanders' platform or the Democratic platform for that matter (although we are beginning to hear a faint chorus in favor of reparations from some Democratic hopefuls).

Need I remind my Democratic socialist and Christian revolutionary brothers that anytime is the right time, as Spike Lee reminded us, to "Do the Right Thing!"

The pain and suffering experienced by the Jewish people during the holocaust engendered "esprit de corps" with African-Americans from the Atlantic enslavement holocaust. But that is where the similarities end. The Reparations Agreement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany was signed in 1952. In short, Germany was to pay Israel for the costs of "resettling so great a number of uprooted and destitute Jewish refugees after the war and to compensate individual Jews." Three quarters of a century after the holocaust ended, former U.S. Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat negotiated settlements for victims who were not covered under previous agreements.

In contrast, when the Civil War ended in 1865, ideas on how to make the enslaved African-American "whole" were bandied about but never took hold. With the U.S. Presidential election between Hayes and Tilden hanging in the balance, the North conceded to the demands of the South by removing all Federal troops: unleashing another reign of white domestic terror known as Jim Crow. No reconciliation here Bernie... Cornel.

President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act in 1988 to compensate over 100,000 people of Japanese descent who were incarcerated in internment camps during WWII. The federal government legislation extended a formal apology from the U.S. government and paid out \$20,000 in compensation to each surviving victim.

For black people incarceration and their continued enslavement were surreptitiously upheld by the 13th Amendment which was ratified in 1865. Michele Alexander, author of "The New Jim Crow" documents this loophole in the 13th amendment which states: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

The railroading of black people by this nation's legal system for crimes they did not commit are well documented. Add "Three Strikes Legislation" - courtesy of the Democratic Party and signed into law by "Slick Willie" aka former President Bill Clinton - and you'll witness the makings of raw material for the prison/enslave-

ment/industrial complex. No atonement here Bernie... Cornel.

After 12 years of research, Dr. DeGruy developed her theory of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome. DeGruy went on to publish her book of the same name which outlines and addresses the residual impacts of generations of slavery, explain the causes of many of the adaptive survival behaviors in African-American communities.

These maladies show up as lack of self-esteem; feelings of hopelessness/depression; and a general self-destructive outlook. Anytime America has experienced major catastrophes, as in school shootings, grief counselors are rushed to the scene to begin the healing process which hopefully would allow people to handle the trauma. For almost five centuries, no grief counselors were dispatched to help African Americans deal with the trauma and horror of their brutal enslavement.

To all the other naysayers who reject the idea of "work-done payments" for black people on the basis of not quite understanding how disbursements would be handled, allow me to remind them there are various models and formulas already in existence for computing and calculating reparations. For example, black people could be exempt from paying federal taxes and allowed to attend universities who benefitted from our enslavement tuition free. Georgetown University recently passed a student referendum to increase the school's tuition by \$27.20 to compensate the descendants of 272 enslaved Africans who were sold to save Georgetown and the Catholic Church. This bears scrutiny - not waiting!

Even former President Barack Obama maintained black people were too far removed from our enslavement to seek compensation - Bernie echo those sentiments. The recent findings from the Freedmen's Bureau Project have identified a listing of enslaved Africans and their "property value" thus illuminating a direct line to their descendants.

I ask, are we too far removed to see and witness the toils of our labor? No we are not! Most notably, our enslaved labor was used in the construction of the U.S. Capitol and the White House: two shining beacons of light promulgating democracy, while at the same time highlighting the hypocrisy. Above and beyond these examples, our "free" enslaved labor made America the richest nation in the world - but we are too far removed for compensation?

The weight of waiting is a burden black people can no longer endure. David Brooks, a white moderate conservative seems to agree. Brooks writing an op-ed piece for the New York Times titled "The Case for Reparations" opined, "Slavery and the continuing pattern of discrimination aren't only an attempt to steal labor; they are an attempt to cover over a person's soul, a whole people's soul."

Gifted artist, musician and ancestor, Gil-Scott Heron captured this soul wrenching pain and suffering of black people in his song, "Who'll Pay Reparations On My Soul?" Bernie... Cornel I think this question is for the two of you. Barack feel free to chime in.

Tolson Banner is a writer and columnist, Vincent Jones also contributed to this article.