

OPINION

Don't Expect Fair Elections in 2020

We are in a fight and it won't be a fair one

BY OSCAR H. BLAYTON

The African American journey through American history can be summed up in two words – unjust and unfair.



From the moment we first set foot on the North American continent, we have been subjected to atrocities both great and small. Armed with a culture of white supremacy bolstered by their religion and world view, Europeans seeking to create empires spanning the globe built their dream with the lives and labor stolen from Africans and other peoples from around the world.

And while the flames of former imperial aspirations have settled into the glowing embers of financial and military hegemony, control over much of the world's resources remains in the grip of European nations and the Western nation states they spawned.

America, one of those spawns of European colonialism, is a curious mix of posturing as a rebellious breakaway from old European values while being the most ardent advocate of the old-world concept of white supremacy. America has managed for centuries to juggle its race hatred and

notions of democratic fervor with a skill unmatched elsewhere in the world.

As 2020 dawns, it is imperative that people of color accept the reality that significant numbers of European Americans are willing to deny us of our rights in order to maintain a world order that favors them. These people who identify most with their European ancestry and have an explicit or implicit bias against people of color are preparing to trash the constitutional values they hypocritically claim to love so dearly in order to put people of color "back in our place."

With the national disgrace who squats in the White House leading the hate-mongering, Republicans and other conservatives are preparing to strip the vote from people of color and make it impossible for our voices to be heard in the nation's elections in November.

People of color are being purged from voting rolls, and the polling places most convenient to us are being closed. Conservative judges recently appointed by Trump are not likely to find fault with these tactics. They will find no fault in these injustices and illegalities being carried out by even the worst violators of the Constitution.

But this is not the time to give up. Nor is it the time to give in. I am old enough to remember when white bigots ruled the South and threw up barricades in front of every black

person who wanted to exercise his or her right to cast a ballot. I remember the marches, the fire hoses, the dogs and the baton wielding "law enforcement officers" used against our people. And I remember the courts ruling that this was the way it should be in America.

Today, there are many European Americans we can count as our allies, just as there were during the civil rights movement. But we must not lull ourselves into believing that they are in the majority. Fifty-three percent of white women voted for Donald Trump despite his crudeness, dishonesty, ignorance and all the other negative qualities he possesses.

Many pundits tried to sugarcoat the reason for Trump's popularity by saying his message of economic prosperity was his appeal. But they never tried to explain why his message had no appeal for poor people of color. The truth is Donald Trump had only one thing to sell to America, and that was white supremacy. This nation had just been through eight years of a president with dark skin, and it is no secret that this drove many European Americans into a type of madness. They saw their world of white supremacy, that took centuries to build, beginning to crumble before their eyes. And this was something they could never allow.

With the law once again bending back towards their advantage, white supremacists want to keep

people of color away from the voting booths in order to continue this regression. And we must do everything we can to prevent that.

We must organize and support groups to review the latest voting rolls in order to identify people who were unfairly purged.

We need to urge those who have been unfairly purged to re-register to vote.

We must help those who have been purged for cause to become qualified to register and vote. But if a person is ineligible to register, they need to be informed so that they do not fall in the trap of violating local election laws by trying to register.

And we need to arrange to get people to the polls, especially in communities where nearby polling places have been closed and transportation is needed to reach the new ones.

We also need to encourage people to vote by letting them know how important this election is.

Finally, we need to encourage qualified people to become candidates and support them, both during their campaigns and once they have been elected to office.

We are in for a fight and it will not be a fair one, but it is a fight we can win, just like we won more than a half century ago.

Oscar H. Blayton is a former Marine Corps combat pilot and human rights activist who practices law in Virginia.

Injustices Created the Racial Wealth Divide

Bridge the gap for kids with 'baby bonds'

BY JESSICAH PIERRE

The gap between America's ultra-wealthy and the rest of us is growing dramatically as wealth continues to concentrate at the top



at the expense of the rest of us. One major symptom of this economic rift is the racial wealth divide, which is greater today than it was nearly four decades ago.

The median black family today owns \$3,600 — just 2 percent of the \$147,000 of wealth the median white family owns. At the extreme top, the Forbes 400 richest Americans own more wealth than all black households, plus a quarter of Latino households, combined.

When analyzing the racial wealth divide, it's important to note that this is a systemic issue — a result of policies, not individual behavior.

Darrick Hamilton, executive director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State, emphasizes that the key ingredient of how successful you'll be in America isn't how hard you work individually — it's how wealthy your family is.

For instance, the racial wealth gap continues to grow despite rising rates of black employment and education. These other things simply can't make up for enormous, systemic disparities in family wealth.

Hamilton's proposed solution? "Baby bonds."

Baby bonds are federally managed accounts set up at birth for children and endowed by the government with assets that will grow over time. Neither the child

nor their parents would be able to access these funds until the child reaches adulthood, at which point they could use the money to get an education, purchase a home, or start a business.

Baby bonds could play an essential role in balancing the historical injustices that created the racial wealth divide.

One recent study shows a baby bond program has the potential to reduce the current black-white wealth divide more than tenfold. Another shows that had a baby bond program been initiated 40 years ago, the Latinx-white wealth divide would be closed by now — and the black-white wealth divide would have shrunk by 82 percent.

Baby bonds are an essential, universal, race-conscious program to provide everyone with an opportunity to start life off secure, irrespective of their race and the financial position in which they're born.

And they're just 1 of 10 bold

solutions offered in a 2019 Institute for Policy Studies report on closing the racial wealth divide, which counts Hamilton among its coauthors.

"Large scale policy change," it concludes, "is the most promising path to addressing the racial wealth divide and many asset poor whites as well." The report also recommends solutions ranging from Medicare for All and higher taxes on the wealthy to setting up a congressional committee to study reparations.

Just like all other issues of inequality in America, the racial wealth divide is a structural problem that requires structural solutions. In order to create economic prosperity for every American, we must start with taking bold action to close the racial wealth divide once and for all.

Jessicah Pierre is the inequality media specialist at the Institute for Policy Studies.



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