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# OPINION

## Building Back Better for Black America

### Can Biden succeed where Obama fell short?

BY DEDRICK ASANTE-MUHAMMAD AND TYLER BOND

Twelve years ago, the inauguration of America's first Black president had many Americans believing that a future free of racial discrimination and inequality was finally within reach.

This year, as Obama's former vice president Joe Biden takes office amid a surge in far-right violence, it's clear we have a long way to go — not just to build a safer country for all of us, but to close the vast racial wealth divide.

Despite Obama's historic victory, his administration made

little to no progress in bridging this divide.



Over Obama's presidency, median Black wealth never returned to even its modest \$10,700 from before the Great Recession. By 2013, it had dropped to just \$1,700 — virtually nothing — even as white wealth rebounded.

In fact, the racial wealth divide in the latter half of the Obama presidency was the largest it's been in the last 30 years. Income inequality remained virtually unchanged, too. In 2007, Black Americans earned about 60 percent as much as whites. By 2016, that had fallen to 58 percent.

In the aftermath of the Great Recession, homeownership — the key source of wealth for most

middle-class families — decreased for most Americans. But new Black homeowners were hit hardest, driving the Black homeownership rate down from 49 to just 44 percent, nearly 30 percentage points lower than the rate for white Americans.

Of course, the failure to bridge racial economic inequality is not unique to the Obama presidency. Whether under Trump, Clinton, or either Bush, there has been little to no progress in bridging the economic divide for African Americans in wealth, homeownership, and income.

This lack of progress should be a wake-up call: Bold action is necessary. That's why we're calling on President Biden to announce a White House Office of Racial Economic Equity.

This office should develop a government-wide audit to rigorously assess all significant economic

policies and programs for how they affect racial inequality. This office should also issue a public report with actionable reforms and legislative proposals for Congress.

Biden's inauguration, just two days after Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, was almost 60 years from the date when Dr. King delivered his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," that be-moaned that moderation was the "Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom."

He was right. In the 21st century, we have seen Black progress go from a "stride toward freedom" to being stuck in economic apartheid. Moderate reforms by Democrats — along with often open hostility from Republicans — have corresponded with decades of failure in addressing racial economic inequality.

Biden is the the 45th white man to take the presidency. Unlike Obama, or his own vice president Kamala Harris, his inauguration did not make racial history. Still, Biden has the opportunity to do what the Obama administration and every other administration has failed to do over the last 40 years.

Opening a White House Office of Racial Economic Equity can steer the country toward greater opportunity and financial security for African Americans. It is way past due to finally "Build Back Better" for Black America.

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### Letter to the Editor

The clock counts down from five as he crosses half court and is immediately met by his defender. Four, he crosses over and peels around the screen set by his teammate. Three, as the defensive help rushes at him, he stops, elevates, and lets the shot fly. Two, the ball rotates through the air as he watches with confidence. One, the ball tears through the bottom of the net. Zero, the fans erupt in their seats, his teammates sprint towards him to celebrate, three points are added to the scoreboard. Damian Lillard turns knowingly as he taps his wrist, Dame Time.

It's a familiar scene for Lillard fans, but less familiar is his place within the music industry as a rapper under the moniker Dame D.O.L.L.A. Though many players in the league rap, Lillard is unanimously regarded as the best, with a smooth flow constructed with impressive rhyme schemes, Dame raps like Jay Z with a Bay Area sensibility. Raised in Oakland, Calif., his roots are evident in his music. The name of his debut album, *The Letter O*, is a clever homage to his life: his upbringing in Oakland, his college years in Ogden, UT, and his professional career in Oregon. With that much thought placed into the title of an album, it's not surprising his lyrics are just as rousing, but more importantly, they're inspiring, commonly promoting a

message of positivity.

Hip hop today is dominated by ego driven, toxic masculinity and females twerking for camera time. Positive messages are rarely heard, but we've all heard of Damian Lillard. With his status he could easily make braggado-

cios music, but instead he creates something uplifting. Messages of unity and humility abound as evidenced in "Loyal to the Soil", a popular track, where he raps "do a lot for others, not for credit or to soak in, but to have an impact on the direction that they go in".

## Lillard's Positivity

After a tumultuous year where the divide in humanity was made obvious and society was left on shaky ground, it's important we all work towards taking a positive step forward. Whether Dame's intention was to make a positive impact or that's just his

style, it's an outlook that needs to be expressed more. We all need to stay motivated, stay humbled, and lend a compassionate hand to our brothers and sisters. We should all listen to some Dame D.O.L.L.A.

*Dylan Koller, Portland*

