Remember the Moores at Christmastime

Late on Christmas night terrorists bombed a wood-framed house in Mims, Florida. Harry Moore, 46, died instantly. His wife Harriette, 49, would die days later. They were African-American civil rights leaders. That was 1951. No one was convicted. Too few remember.

The explosion was heard for miles. Neighbors rushed to their single story home usually kept so neat to find splintered wood, broken glass, and a gaping hole where the bedroom used to be. As the couple slept, terrorists had placed a bomb under their home near the bedroom.

NNPA Columnist

Gloria J. Browne-Marshall

That Christmas Day marked their 25th wedding anniversary. The Moores had been community activists standing up for justice when others were too afraid. In 1934, Harry Moore started the Brevard County NAACP. He organized Florida's first NAACP conference.

Harriette Moore was a teacher. Harry Moore was a principle. When Black and White teachers received very different salaries for the same work, Harry Moore helped Black teachers file the first lawsuit brought in the Deep South to equalize salaries. The Moores believed race pride, education, and determination would defeat the racial prejudice facing Black students in segregated Florida.

Fear erases memories. No arrests were made.

Harry Moore investigated the 1943 lynching of Cellos Harrison, African-American. According to the organization Civil Rights and Restorative Justice, the lifeless body of Cellos Harrison was found near Florida's State Road 84. He had been lynched in retaliation for the unsolved murder of a white service station owner killed three years earlier.

Then, in 1944, there was the lynching of 15-year-old Willie James Howard, African-American. He had been taken to the Suwannee River by Phil Goff, a White Florida legislator, who was the father of a girl to whom Howard had given a Christmas card. The boys' body was found the following day. Harry Moore took affidavits, wrote letters, and called for a federal investigation.

Although no one was arrested for these crimes Harry and Harriette Moore continued their fight for lynching victims in Florida long after others gave up. In spite of intimidation, the Moores pushed for voting rights. Harry Moore formed the Florida Progressive Voter's League.

Registering Black voters and challenging White political power resulted in the loss of both of their teaching jobs. However, Harry gained a position leading the Florida branches of the NAACP, as Executive Secretary.

But, by 1951, Harry Moore was probably considered too radical for the NAACP. Several years prior to the NAACP's famous case of Brown v. Board of Education, the Moores were pushing for integration of public facilities and statewide civil rights legislation. Although the NAACP wanted him removed, Harry Moore refused.

Harry Moore said he "placed his life on the alter" for racial justice. The Groveland case only increased the danger. Two years earlier, Florida's Groveland community was the site of mob violence when four young black men were accused of raping a White woman. They were convicted and sentenced to die. Harry Moore investigated.

When the Groveland defendants were beaten in jail Moore levelled charges of police brutality. Whites rioted when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Groveland death sentences. Then, while driving back to court, the local sheriff shot two of the handcuffed Groveland defendants, killing Sammy Shepard. Sheriff Willis McCall claimed they had tried to escape.

Harry Moore called for the arrest of the sheriff. It was November of 1951. The Moore's house was bombed that Christmas. An FBI investigation pointed to three klansmen. But, fear erases memories. No arrests were made. The FBI file was closed in 1955.

There were attempts to re-open the case. In 1978 an informant died of cancer days before he was scheduled to testify about the killings. In 1991 the case was reopened but failed to deliver results. After nearly 50 years, Florida's NAACP and Department of Justice succeeded in gaining a full investigation.

In 2004, Florida Attorney General Charlie Crist revealed the 4 men he believed conspired to kill the Moores. Their names are: Earl Brooklyn, Tilman Belvins, Joseph Cox, and Ed Spivey. By that time, these Klansmen, long suspected of committing this crime, were all deceased.

However, the sacrifice of the Moores remains a part of civil rights history. In Brevard County, Florida, a beautiful re-creation of their home is open to all who wish to consider the price of freedom. This memorial park and cultural center, created in their honor, is on 11 acres of land once owned by civil rights activists.

Freedom has never been free. This year remember Harry and Harriette Moore. They paid the ultimate price for freedom on Christmas Day.

Gloria J. Browne-Marshall, an Associate Professor of Constitutional Law at John Jay College in New York City, is the author of "Race, Law, and American Society: 1607 to Present," and a legal correspondent covering the U.S. Supreme Court, United Nations, and major court cases. Twitter: GBrowneMarshall

Did the Fed Remove the Punch Bowl Too Fast?

Last week the Federal Reserve's Federal Open Market Committee announced it will ease back on its "pedal to the metal" monetary easing policy. The Fed will remain in an expansionary mode, just slower.

Afl-cio

William Spriggs

To an optimist, this is a sign from an independent authority that the economy is stabilized and on a sustained path forward. Unemployment rates are falling, job creation over the last few months is averaging more than 200,000 net new jobs a month, the Gross Domestic Product (the value of all goods and services made in America in a year) rose 4.1 percent last quarter, led by investment, and housing starts increased to a five-year high in November. Those are good signs. President Obama could take a bow. Republicans, who have conceded nothing to the president on economic policy, would be left with more whining. But it may be too early to remove the punch bowl.

The Fed believes the good signs in the economy prove its policy is moving the economy forward. It is obviously true that with Congress locking the president into endless debates on shrinking the government and slowing the economy that the Fed is the only economic policymaker trying to expand the economy. Clearly, if the Fed did not take action, things would be worse. But that is different than whether the policy actually is moving the economy. Here the story is more difficult.

A healthy recovery needs to see rising wages for workers.

The Fed controls interest rates, and so can encourage more investment to take place-the low cost of money makes more investment projects profitable. Private-sector investment is recovering. It has returned, in real amounts, to its pre-recession levels in equipment and intellectual property, but still lags in construction. But, as a percent of the GDP, private investment is a smaller share of GDP than its pre-recession peak of about 19 percent of GDP. Worse, while interest rates are low, public investment is declining. At the federal level, government investment has been falling since 2010, mostly led by defense reductions. State and local governments are in worse shape on making investments. They have been reducing investments since 2008 and are at levels that are near 13-year lows. At precisely the time investments in our schools, roads, ports, sewer and water systems can be made at record low interest rates, the public sector is de-investing.

This lack of robust investment is critical because a higher share of GDP needs to go to investing in America's future.

More investment, public and private, is needed so we have the public and private capital-buildings, machines and roads-to fuel and sustain our growth. With such low interest rates yielding only modest levels of investment, it isn't clear how easily the Fed could stimulate the economy if it slowed again. So, slowing things down has great risks. Clearly, higher interest rates are not going to stimulate more investment.

The real problem is that the "real" economy-the wages of workers, employment and output-are not back to pre-recession levels. Instead of investing to expand America's capacity, too many firms are using low interest rates to borrow money to buy back their company's stock. That borrowing does not increase potential output, but it does make the price of stocks rise and therefore the pay and bonuses of corporate CEOs continues to soar. It is a key reason the 1% continue to see their incomes rise.

A healthy recovery needs to see rising wages for workers. But, with more than 1.2 million fewer jobs than in 2008, and more than 2.8 job seekers per job opening, there is little pressure for wages to rise. The record low share of young people employed has resulted in a smaller share of Americans working. That makes households very fragile, because each worker has to stretch his or her pay further to support others. Republicans think the solution is easy on that score-simply cut the government out of helping support the incomes of the unemployed or the underemployed, whose wages are so low they need the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps) to eat. Such stinginess does not reduce the dependence of workers; it just makes the 99 percent piece of the pie shrink.

It may not be too late for Congress and the president to pull their weight and conduct the expansionary policy needed to restore public investment to ensure America's growth. But the economy is frailer with the Fed taking away the punch bowl.

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