

What Black America can do to end inequality

Solutions affecting income inequality and police reform must come from African American community itself

Washington Times, By Gary Anderson, July 8, 2020



Time magazine sonorously announced that, “America must change” in its July 6 issue. Judging from the ethnic makeup of its essayists, a better theme might have been “White America must change.” Since the Memorial Day killing of George Floyd by a White police officer, there has been a hue and cry for White Americans to end the inequality between them and their Black brothers and sisters. Whites it seems have a duty to end the fact that the percentage of

African-Americans in the penal system far exceeds their percentage of the population.

Whites also need to address the growing income gap between themselves and African-Americans. The method in which this transformation is being implemented is curious. Statues — some of them having nothing to do with racism — have been toppled, there have been countless protest marches, and many progressive White citizens have publicly confessed to the sin of Whiteness.

For 60 years, well-meaning Americans of all races have tried to address these issues. We have had an Equal Rights Amendment, a War on Poverty, school busing, and countless affirmative action initiatives. The result has been that the Black poverty and crime rates have remained high, and they may be getting worse. Perhaps it is time for the Black community to admit that there are some structural dysfunctions in the African-American community that only it can address. Until that happens, the mea culpas from Whites will be the moral equivalent of rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

There are three things that can be done to improve the lot of African-Americans in the country that only they can do. The rest of us can help and support, but we cannot do it for them. Most important, the rate of single parent households in African-American households must come down from the 65 percent it stands at today. This is the gorilla in the room that gets conveniently overlooked in the talk about the Black arrest and incarceration rate as well as the abysmally low high school graduation rate among African-American students.

There was a time when the welfare system disincentivized Black fathers from remaining in the home, but the Clinton-Gingrich welfare reforms of the 1990s largely eliminated those. Congress and the states could help by rewarding two-parent families more than they do now, but leaders in churches, community organizations and schools need to break the institutionalized acceptance of absent fathers. The Million Man March of 2000 was meant to

be a start, but like most protests and demonstrations, it resulted in sound and fury with no coherent plan of action.

A second thing that the nation's African-American communities can do is strengthen relations with their police forces rather than defund or disestablish them. Those communities possess a powerful tool for police reform. Other than African-Americans, one of the most loyal constituencies of the Democratic Party is organized labor; and police unions



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have been the biggest impediment to police reform and improved police discipline.

If our military leaders had to go through the hoops that our nation's police chiefs do in getting rid of bad actors, the services would have become combat ineffective years ago. Our urban areas with the most troubled police forces are those with democratic leaders. If the African-American community would put pressure on mayors and city councils to reduce the influence of police unions on discipline, we would see a dramatic increase in effectiveness in police-community relations.

It would be enormously useful if churches, community organizations and other elements of civil society would coordinate with local law enforcement to create neighborhood watch organizations to help de-escalate situations before police have to be called.

Finally, young African-Americans should be encouraged to use military service as an entry level portal into upward economic mobility. Blacks were inordinately represented in Vietnam. But since 2000, the number of African-Americans serving in the military has dropped to about their percentage of the population. African Americans who have served successfully in the military are far more likely to succeed in later life than those who do not serve. Admittedly, African-Americans are still underrepresented in the senior ranks of the military, but that will change if more are in uniform.

The fact that these recommendations are being made by a White guy rather than an African-American academic or leader is part of the problem. It is far easier to put the blame elsewhere than to accept some degree of responsibility.

Gary Anderson lectures on Alternative Analysis at the graduate level

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