

The Unspoken Truth of
Our Racial Divide



**WHITE
RAGE**

CAROL ANDERSON, Ph.D.

BLOOMSBURY

WHITE RAGE

*The Unspoken Truth of
Our Racial Divide*

Carol Anderson

B L O O M S B U R Y
NEW YORK • LONDON • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Epilogue

Imagine

Not even a full month after Dylann Roof gunned down nine African Americans at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump fired up his “silent majority” audience of thousands in July 2015 with a macabre promise: “Don’t worry, we’ll take our country back.”¹

It’s time instead that we take our country forward into the future, a better future.

More than a century and a half of anger and fear have undermined American democracy, trampled on the Constitution, and treated some citizens as chattel and others as collateral damage.

This didn’t have to be. The Land of Opportunity did not have to be the Land of Missed Opportunities. We, as a nation, have a choice. We’ve always had those choices, but instead of seizing the moment and moving forward, we have been diverted by the rage and the fear that have kept us spiraling in recurring themes of racism, discrimination, disfranchisement, illiteracy, and a thoroughly inequitable criminal justice system.

It is time to defuse the power of white rage. It is time to move into that future. It is a future where the right to vote is unfettered by discriminatory restrictions that prevent millions of American citizens from having any say in their own government. A poll tax in 1942 that led to only 3 percent of the voting-age population in seven Southern states choosing elected officials was never a democracy. And neither, in this decade, is a voter turnout of 1.48 percent in

Texas's statewide election. Moreover, the millions of dollars that Republican governors and legislators have spent on new voter suppression laws—purportedly to stop a voter fraud problem that never existed—while gutting health care, mental health, and education funding in already strained state budgets, suggests that the cost of subverting democracy extends far beyond the ballot box.²

The future is one that invests in our children by making access to good schools the norm, not the exception, and certainly not dependent on zip code. We know the consequences of dysfunctional school systems. We see the wasted lives, just as clearly as Eisenhower and Congressman Carl Elliott saw them during the Sputnik crisis. At that time, the political leaders chose to look away, to avert their eyes, as if leaving millions of children in segregated, decrepit schools did not undermine the hopes of America's smallest citizens while also undercutting the strength of the nation as a whole. We can choose not to listen to the rage and, instead, craft a stronger, more viable future for this nation. We can ask tough questions such as: Why use property taxes as the basis for funding schools when that method rewards discriminatory public policy and perpetuates the inequalities that undermine our society?

The future is one that takes seriously a justice system whose enormous powers are actually used to serve and protect. The misuse is storied—from the convict-lease labor system, to one that allowed known murderers to walk around scot-free, to one that is now employed to undercut the gains of the Civil Rights Movement.³ A program that stops and frisks predominantly those who are the least likely to have illegal contraband is not law enforcement.⁴ A war on drugs that uses race and ethnicity as the litmus test for crime is not justice.⁵ Millions of black citizens recognize this and, therefore, question the very legitimacy of this key pillar in American democracy.⁶ Meanwhile, state budgets have cracked under the strain of bloated, unsustainable prison systems.⁷ Mayors worry that their cities will ignite when yet another black person, who is more likely

than
misu
State
It
Ir
of f
auto
ance
re-fig
stor
beer
Ir
boas
natio
that
had
hun
scien
educ
wha
as tl
thar
dwir
In
Mar
that
trati
wer
that
serv
area
fam
have

than not unarmed, is killed by police.⁸ The costs of the continued misuse of the criminal justice system are more than the United States can bear—morally, politically, and financially.

It is time to rethink America.

Imagine if Reconstruction had actually honored the citizenship of four million freedpeople—provided the education, political autonomy, and economic wherewithal warranted by their and their ancestors' hundreds of years of free labor. If, instead of continually re-fighting the Civil War, we had actually moved on to rebuilding a strong, viable South, a South where poor whites, too—for they had been left out as well—could gain access to proper education.

Imagine the educational prowess our population might now boast had *Brown* actually been implemented. What a very different nation we would be if all the enormous legal and political efforts that went into subverting and undermining the right to education had actually been used to uphold and ensure that right. If all those hundreds upon hundreds of millions of federal dollars poured into science education had actually rained down on those hungry for education, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income. Think about what a different national conversation we might be having, even as the economy turns ever more surely to knowledge-based, rather than watching our share of the world's scientists and engineers dwindle.

Imagine if the Civil Rights Movement had really resulted in Martin Luther King's "Beloved Community," instead of in a society that, to this day, willfully celebrates the very presidential administration that launched a war on drugs against its own people, who were neither mobilized nor addicted to begin with—a war on drugs that was manufactured out of whole cloth for devious and self-serving ends. Think about how different our cities and our rural areas would be without the scourge of drugs that has decimated families and communities. What if all the billions of dollars that have been diverted into militarizing police for a phony war and

building prison after prison had been devoted instead to education, to housing, to health care?

Imagine if, instead of launching into spurious attacks about his citizenship and filling the blogosphere with racist simian depictions, the United States had been able to harness the awe-inspiring symbolism of our first black president, which had already led an Iranian and a Russian, among others, to see something in the spirit of America that surpassed even its material wealth.

We shouldn't have to imagine.

Full voting rights for American citizens, funding and additional resources for quality schools, and policing and court systems in which racial bias is not sanctioned by law—all these are well within our grasp. Visionaries, activists, judges, and politicians before us saw what America could be and fought hard for that kind of nation. This is the moment now when all of us—black, white, Latino, Native American, Asian American—must step out of the shadow of white rage, deny its power, understand its unseemly goals, and refuse to be seduced by its buzzwords, dog whistles, and sophistry. This is when we choose a different future.

Thank you does
gratitude behind
you to the Op-Ed
Chloe Angyal. I
Carlos Lozada, y
you. Then came
become. Thank y
all along the way
indispensable. Su
keen, masterful e
You are simply an

At Emory Univ
ways than he can
thank you for pro
page." Natasha T
was blessed with a
of the park! Than
Rainey II. Thank y
beyond the call of
for you. La Shanda
ness so that I coul
one of those balls i

And most of a
colleagues who i