

FORUM

50 years of Black Progress



Ben Chavis
Guest Columnist



Ron Rogers/The Chronicle

Has Black America made significant progress politically, socially and economically over the past 50 years? This is not only an important question to pose, it is equally important to answer. And the answer is a resounding yes.

In fact, 1965 to 2015 has been a remarkable period in the history of Black America. But make no mistake about it: all of our progress has come as a direct result of a protracted struggle for freedom, justice and equality.

The universal right to self-determination is a fundamental human right recognized by the United Nations. We have too often allowed non-Blacks to misdefine our reality with distorted myths, negative stereotypes and cynicism.

This year will mark the largest Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) with 46 members. In 1965, there were only five African-Americans in the Congress.

We have come a long way politically in the past 50 years at the federal, state and local levels. In addition to representation in the House and Senate, we have served as mayors of big cities, as governors, as lieutenant governors, as speakers of state legislatures, as county commission chairs, as city council chairs, as school board presidents and as national party chairs.

Black participation in state legislatures alone has increased five-fold during the past five decades.

Since the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Black Power has moved from becoming a chant to a political reality. The late Edward Brooke (R-Mass.) blazed the way as the first Black attorney general of a state and later as the first African-American popularly elected to the U.S. Senate. Following suit as governors were Doug Wilder in Virginia and Deval Patrick in Massachusetts.

Jesse L. Jackson's 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns paved the way for

Barack Obama's successful campaign in 2008 to become the first Black elected president of the United States of America.

On the heels of that success and Blacks voting at a higher percentage than Whites in 2012 for the first time, have come efforts by Republicans to suppress the Black vote. This effort, carried out largely by Republican-dominated state legislatures, is underway as America experiences a dramatic demographic shift.

We are grateful that Sister Jeri Green and others at the U.S. Census Bureau that have assembled the latest social and demographic

statistics for Black History Month observance:

- As of July 1, 2012, there are now 44.5 million Black Americans, either alone or in combination with one or more other races, in the U.S., up 1 percent over 2011.

- New York is the state with the largest Black American population, with 3.7 million. The District of Columbia has the highest percentage of Black Americans at 51.6 percent, followed by Mississippi at 38 percent. Texas has the highest numeric increase in Black Americans since 2011 (87,000). Cook County, Ill. (Chicago) had the largest Black American

population of any county as of 2012 at 1.3 million.

- The percentage of Blacks 25 and older with a high school diploma or higher was 83.2 percent.

- The percentage of African-Americans in that same age group with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2012 was 18.7 percent.

- There were 3.7 million Blacks enrolled in college as of 2012, a 28 percent increase over the 2.9 million in 2007.

- The annual median family income of Black households was \$33,321 in 2012, compared to the national figure of \$55,017.

- The poverty rate for African-Americans was

27.2 percent in 2012, compared to 15 percent nationally.

- There were 9.8 million family households in 2013 and among Black households, 45.7 percent contained married couples.

- There was a record 17.8 million Black voter turnout in 2012, a 1.7 million voter increase of the number of Black Americans who voted in 2008.

- The record 66.2 percent of Black Americans who voted in the 2012 presidential election was higher than the 64.1 percent of non-Hispanic Whites who voted in 2012.

Yes, we have made progress over the past half-century, but future progress will not happen by osmosis. Rather, it will happen when we become wiser about how we spend more than \$1 trillion each year. We will also need to focus on strengthening Black-owned businesses and grow a new generation of committed young entrepreneurs.

To be blunt, Black Americans cannot afford to entertain any ideas of not moving forward to make more progress over the next 50 years. We have come too far to turn back now.

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Stop playing Russian Roulette with our children



Henry J. Pankey
Guest Columnist

The "real" curriculum of children extends beyond the schoolhouse. We are right to mandate rigor, relevance and relationships, but we cannot afford to ignore the "authentic syllabus" of our children.

The tragedies of fatal school shootings represent shameless violence. Its gravity mirrors the trauma suffered by youth each day. Due to naïve security procedures, we have not secured campuses or adequately protected children.

The words of Thomas Jefferson resound like a deafening volcano: "I tremble for my country when I consider God is just and his justice will not sleep forever."

Dr. Martin Luther King's message may explain the motivation behind classroom disruptions: "True peace is not the absence of tension, but the presence of justice." When there is no justice, there is no peace. The perception of injustice creates discipline problems and chaos in our classrooms.

We are not powerless. We can make our streets, homes and schools safe. Cowering to violent individuals is an unacceptable option. Weapons are in the hands of young people, criminals or the mentally unstable. Some students take weapons to school out of fear. However, children do not make guns or profit from them. Firearms represent big business for gun manufacturers.

The National Crime Prevention Council reported 135,000 illegal guns are in schools each year. The U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Science states 2 percent of public schools use daily metal detector checks or other security procedures.

Politicians, educators, parents and community-based organizations are concerned about the image and intrusiveness of these potentially lifesaving instruments. Students are worried about getting killed!



The undeniable truth is that fearful pupils do not do well on state tests. Profanity, pants rebelliously worn low enough to show naked butts, provocative clothing, sexu-

security surveillance cameras risk the loss of their careers.

The average superintendent is fired within three years. Principals work under

environment conducive to teaching and learning is shameful. The inability or unwillingness to ensure safety represents poor leadership and professional child abuse.

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ally explicit T-shirts, vulgar language, unsightly graffiti, gangs, suspensions, uncontrollable behavior problems beg for competent leadership.

Politicians are looking for cover and damage control. Opinion polls and Teflon image packages are poor substitutes for prudence, courage, leadership and safety precautions.

The African proverb states, "When the hut is burning, there is no time to argue." For many, the hut has been burning for a long time. For whom the bell tolls? It tolls for K-12 children in our schools.

Superintendents, principals and educators courageous enough to mandate tough love, character education, high-academic standards, enforce discipline codes, dress standards, install metal detectors and

fragile contracts instead of tenure. It takes about 10 angry parents to get rid of a superintendent or principal. The current system rewards and promotes status quo administrators. The goal of many principals is to survive.

It is often professional suicide for change agents to promote school reform as an alternative to reform school a.k.a. the pipeline to prison. Teachers are afraid of principals, principals are afraid of superintendents, superintendents are afraid of school board members, and board members are afraid of voters. Violent, dysfunctional, and disruptive students fear no one. Fear and intimidation rule!

Nationally, school security is a tragedy waiting to happen. It's a joke, but it is not funny. The failure to create a safe and orderly envi-

ronment conducive to teaching and learning is shameful. The inability or unwillingness to ensure safety represents poor leadership and professional child abuse.

When people are afraid, they make stupid decisions. Racial profiling and stereotypes create additional problems. Fear is not a well-developed safety plan. Suspending every child with a problem is not an effective discipline plan or an effective strategy to improve test scores. Many school safety plans represent a prayer that everyone will play nice. Rarely are they distributed, read, discussed or analyzed. Some stakeholders are clueless about its location or content. The game of school safety Russian Roulette is a serious game that must stop! You can call some high schools and have your child sent home. Teenagers have a history of using friends to impersonate parents. Handwritten notes work, too. An unidentified adult can come on campus and

take a child away. This is easier in high schools. Almost anyone can walk into a school, get a temporary visitor's pass, walk around, and "scope out" the place.

If school personnel requests identification, an angry voice, or threats rarely fail. Get loud! Threats to get someone fired works like a magic charm! All of this is true, but it is wrong and potentially fatal. Sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity are dangerous characteristics of school personnel.

Tragically, the epidemic of disruptive behavior, school violence, and shootings temporarily enlighten us. We erroneously believe the problem is someone else's school, neighborhood, or only applies to the bad crowd. "It is not my child and will not happen in our school."

Safety is a mandatory responsibility that requires consultation with school safety experts, parents, students, educators, and law enforcement officials. We need gang experts, street smarts, experience, common sense and proven research-based solutions.

It helps to have a fearless principal with a documented history of success. A safe and orderly school conducive to teaching and a high level of student achievement should represent mandatory civil rights for all children.

It's time to stop playing Russian Roulette with the health, welfare, safety and lives of our children.

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