

commentary

Poor People are Discouraged From Voting



By George E. Curry

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Bernie Sanders on Sunday tried to attribute most of his losses to Hillary Clinton - his recent string of victories notwithstanding - to poor people not voting.

"Poor people don't vote," he said on NBC's Meet the Press. "I mean, that's just a fact. That's a sad reality of American society."

What's a fact is that when poor people do vote, they are not voting for Bernie Sanders.

As the Washington Post observed, "Sanders has lost Democratic voters with household incomes below \$50,000 by 55 percent to 44 percent to Clinton across primaries where network exit polls have been conducted."

He lost to Clinton 21 percent among voters bringing in more than \$100,000 a year and by 9 points among middle income voters, according to the newspaper.

So if more poor people were voting, if the current trends hold true, Clinton would be beating Sanders by an even larger margin.

There is no doubt that poor people are far less likely to vote than more affluent citizens. According to the Census Bureau, 47 percent of eligible adults with family incomes of less than \$20,000 annually voted in 2012. By contrast, approximately 80 percent of those in families earning \$100,000 or more a year voted in 2012. Similar patterns also held true to voter registration.

Sanders said on Meet the Press, "If we can significantly increase voter turnout so that low-income people and working people and young people participated in the political process, if we got a voter turnout of 75 percent, this country would be radically transformed."

Sanders failed to address why poor people are less likely to vote.

A study for Caltech and MIT reported that people generally failed to vote for a variety of reasons, including dissatisfaction with the choice of candidates, other obligations, transportation problems and registration issues.

Under the headline, "Why Are the Poor and Minorities Less Likely to Vote?," an article in Atlantic magazine noted, "While income and education levels were not recorded in the survey, race and age were major factors influencing who made it to the polls on Election Day and what kind of barriers they faced. Black and Hispanic citizens, for whom the poverty rate is close to three times that of whites, were three times as likely as whites to not have the requisite I.D. and to have difficulty finding the correct polling place. They were more than three times as likely as whites to not receive a requested absentee ballots, and roughly twice as likely to be out of town on Election Day or to have to wait in long lines.

"They were also substantially more likely than whites to report transportation problems and bad time and location as reasons for not getting to the polls; while white voters were the most likely to cite disapproval of candidate choices. Taken together, the surveys suggest that white citizens who abstain from voting do so primarily by choice, while the majority of minority non-voters face problems along the way."

And the problems faced along the way are considerable. According to the Caltech/MIT survey, between 910,000 and 3 million votes were lost in 2008 as a result of registration problems. Another 1.5 million voters said the polling places were poorly run and 1 million reported feeling intimidated at the polls. Of those asked to show a photo ID, 70 percent were Black, 65 percent were Latino and only 51 percent were White, according to the study.

The United States voter turnout consistently trails most developed countries.

According to the Pew Research Center, the U.S. turnout rates in 2012 was 53.6 percent, compared to 87.2 percent in Belgium, 86.4 percent in Turkey, and 82.6 percent in Sweden.

Numerous suggestions have been made to make it easier for Americans to vote, including weekend and online voting, extending voting over several days and making the hours more convenient.

But instead of doing that, many states are moving in the opposite direction.

The Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law reported 17 states will have new voter restrictions in place for the 2016 presidential election, ranging from strict Photo ID requirements to curtailing voting hours and adding more registration restrictions.

The 17 states are: Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin.

A survey by the Brennan Center found:

* Seven of the 11 states with the highest Black turnout in 2008 have new voter restrictions in place;

* Eight of the 12 state where Latino population growth was greatest from 2000 to 2010 passed laws making it harder to vote;

* Blacks were four times more likely than Whites to stand in voting lines for more than 30 minutes;

* Latinos were six times more likely than Whites to stand in voting lines more than 30 minutes and

* Voters in precincts in Florida, Maryland and South Carolina with higher percentages of voters of color have fewer voting machines.

It's not easy being poor in this country. And, by design, we seem to be doing very little to increase the number of poor people voting.

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A Call to Arms to End Chicago's Shame

By Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.
President, Rainbow PUSH Coalition
via George Curry Media

"The community's lack of trust in C.P.D. (Chicago Police Department) is justified," so concluded the blistering, in-depth report of the Police Accountability Task Force, set up by Mayor Rahm Emanuel after the uproar surrounding the fatal police shooting of Laquan McDonald.

After a four-month investigation, the task force pulled no punches. "CPD's own data gives validity to the widely held belief the police have no regard for the sanctity of life when it comes to people of color." It detailed a long pattern of institutionalized racial abuse: unjustified stops, physical abuse, torture, detention without counsel, shootings, and more.

The task force backed its conclusions with data drawn from the CPD's own files. Blacks, whites and Hispanics each make up about one-third of the population of Chicago. Yet African Americans constituted three out of every four people that CPD tried to Taser. In addition, 74 percent of the 404 people shot by the Chicago police between 2008 and 2015 were black.

The Task Force also noted that the system itself was designed to be unaccountable. It singled out police union contracts, urging changes in clauses that "make it easy for officers to lie in official reports," give officers 24 hours to get their stories right, ban anonymous citizen complaints, and more. The contracts "have essentially turned the code of silence into official policy."

The task force chair, former federal prosecutor Lori Lightfoot, called the report a "call to arms." It made more than 100 recommendations for change, including creating a new independent civilian oversight panel and a dedicated, independent police inspector general.

Two Chicago aldermen have already introduced draft ordinances to move on these recommendations. The task force recommendations included everything from diversifying the police force, to adding body cams, to changing police patrols.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel met with the task force to review the report. His curt public response was disappointing: "I don't really think you need a task force to know that we have racism in America, we have racism in Illinois, or that there's racism that exists in the city of Chicago and obviously could be in our department ... The question is, what are we going to do to confront it and make the changes in not only personnel but in policies to reflect, I think, the values that make up the diversity of our city?"

Emanuel said his "general attitude" was to "look at everything they say," but then went silent, saying he wanted to review the recommendations before commenting.

Chicago, with the number of shootings rising in recent months, needs an effective police force that has the community's trust. According to a recent Chicago Tribune editorial, this is the seventh such report, each generally issued after another corruption-related scandal. Real reform can no longer be put off. We need serious steps to diversify the police force, to train police, to stop racial profiling, to restructure police-community relations, to enforce accountability and the law.

If Mayor Emanuel won't lead, the City Council need not wait to take action. And the city's powerful business community also must demand accountability. As The New York Times wrote in a powerful editorial on "Chicago's shame," "Chicago's business leaders should be sickened that it took the execution of a teenager for the city's elected leaders to begin to face up to the truth about the Police Department - a truth that the black community has been saying for decades."

Yet, even if the task force's recommendations are adopted, that is only a first step. The CPD is guilty of a long, racially-biased institutionalized pattern of abuse. But they are also tasked with enforcing order over communities in despair, plagued by poverty, unemployment, drugs, guns and a lack of hope. We must reform the police. But we also need a program for urban development, jobs, schools and hope. Without that, the streets will remain hard and ugly, and the people will continue to suffer.

Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. is founder and president of the Chicago-based Rainbow PUSH Coalition. You can keep up with his work at www.rainbowpush.org

Child Watch

Recognizing All of America's Heroes and Sheroes

By Marian Wright Edelman
President, Children's Defense Fund
via George Curry Media

Every day I wear a pair of medallions around my neck with portraits of two of my role models: Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. As a child, I read books about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. She and indomitable and eloquent slave woman Sojourner Truth represent countless thousands of anonymous slave women whose bodies and minds were abused and whose voices were muted by slavery, Jim Crow, segregation and confining gender roles throughout our nation's history.

Although Harriet Tubman could not read books, she could read the stars to find her way north to freedom. And she freed not only herself from slavery, but returned to slave country again and again through forests and streams and across mountains to lead other slaves to freedom at great personal danger. She was tough. She was determined. She was fearless. She was shrewd and she trusted God completely to deliver her, and other fleeing slaves, from pursuing captors who had placed a bounty on her life.

"'Twa'nt me. 'Twas the Lord. I always told Him, I trust You. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect You to lead me. And He always did... On my underground railroad, I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger," she was quoted as saying. No train, bus or airline company can match this former slave woman's safety record. And few of us could match her faithful partnership with God, determination to be free and willingness to help others to be free without thought about self-sacrifice.

Now the entire nation will pay public homage to Harriet Tubman's devotion to freedom, and also honor Sojourner Truth and other great women and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who never stopped demanding and working to assure that America lives up to its declared creed of freedom, life, liberty, pursuit of happiness and equality for all.

Kudos to the Treasury Department which has announced that Harriet Tubman's face will grace the front of the redesigned \$20 bill, making her the first woman in more than a century and first African American ever to be represented on the face of an American paper note. And it's wonderful that she will not be alone. Sojourner Truth and women suffragette activists and leaders will be featured on the back of the \$10 bill. Great contralto and opera singer Marian Anderson, for whom I was named and about whom great conductor Arturo Toscanini said "yours is a voice such as one hears once in a hundred years," will be featured on the back of the \$5 bill.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt arranged for Marian Anderson to perform at the Lincoln Memorial before 75,000 in 1939 after the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to let her sing at Constitution Hall because she was not White. Mrs. Roosevelt and Dr. King will grace the back of the \$5 bill rounding out the inspiring group of determined moral warriors who expanded the civil and human rights of women, people of color and all of us.

Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew said he had an 'aha' moment after recognizing the groundswell of public response to his announcement that the Treasury Department was considering changing the design of the \$10 bill. To so many people these new treasury bills will be much more than pieces of paper. For too long and for too many money has been the most powerful symbol of what we value as a nation. Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Marian Anderson, Eleanor Roosevelt, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Alice Paul, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Martin Luther King, Jr. - their faces on American currency will send powerful messages about what - and who - we Americans are, value and strive to become.

The new bills also will powerfully remind all Americans and teach our children and grandchildren that Black history and women's history are American history. They will take us a giant step forward towards healing our nation's profoundly crippling birth defects of slavery, Native American genocide, and exclusion of all women and non-propertied men of all races from our electoral process and ensuring full participation in our nation's life. It is so important to make sure all of our children can see their ancestors pictured on something as basic as the money used every day by countless millions and this will deepen the meaning of how we define success in America.

And to Black children who remain the poorest group in America, I hope Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth become anchor reminders of their great heritage of strength, courage, faith and belief in the equality of women and people of every color. None of us must ever give up fighting for freedom and equality and human dignity however tough the road. I hope all of our children and all of us will be inspired anew by our diverse and rich heritages and cultures as Americans and renew our determination to build a level playing field in our nation for every child and help our nation shine a brighter beacon of hope in a world hungering for moral example

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund whose Leave No Child Behind(R) mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. For more information go to www.childrensdefense.org

