



PERSPECTIVES

by Rinaldo S. Brutoco

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The White Solution

Last week this column was entitled *Half Slave, Half Free* and dealt with the reality that people of color are not equal in this country; and, that this condition is a fundamental challenge to our "Union" as envisioned by Abraham Lincoln. Hopefully, after the last two weeks of international protests we are ready to embrace the solution to racism. It is not enough to "wish" it away. It is not enough to "hope" it goes away. It is not enough to ignore the reality of 400 years since slavery reached our shores in the hopes that somehow, we can "forget" what has happened. It is not enough to cease being a racist, or thinking one is neutral, it is now incumbent on us to actively be anti-racist. What does this mean? It means, that whites have accumulated the majority of power in our society, so it means whites must be the source of the solution. People of color have been too marginalized to create equality. As Emmanuel Acho concluded, it will take a "White Solution."

South Carolina Congressman James Clyburn recently observed: with few exceptions, almost every white person who came to our shores did so *voluntarily* seeking a better life; and tragically, with very few exceptions his people were brought here under duress as slaves. Those enslaved people and their descendants built this nation with the sweat of their brows and labored to co-create with us the wealth that became the United States *even through the horror of Reconstruction*. They labored to work our farms and build our factories through the incredible indignities of the "the Jim Crow" era.

Today, these same people of color are expected to serve our society even as our society fails to adequately education their children; even though our society fails to provide the same opportunities for housing in the neighborhoods of their choice; even though we continue to abandon vast numbers of our Black fellow citizens to food desert wastelands within the inner city, and deny them the same quality of healthcare, or job opportunities, as we collectively extend to ourselves.

A discussion of these systemic racist challenges often devolves into a debate around the idea of "reparations" as a way to repay our citizens of color who have suffered for generations.

Unfortunately, those conversations become bogged down in practical questions like "Who is entitled to a payment?" and "How would the payment be calculated?" and "How would the payment be made even if we could agree upon who deserved the money, the amounts, and the desire to 'even the score' for centuries of being held back?"

The problem with reparations, beyond the very challenging questions above, is far greater than the dollars. The problem with reparations is: after having been paid in whatever amount and in whatever way determined, the money will be gone and the challenges of our "half slave, half free" society would remain. I strongly believe that the best form of reparations is to morally, legally and *financially* support a permanent program which would remain in effect until equality is achieved for all people of color including Hispanics and Native Americans. Given the current political paralysis, and the *necessity* to act at once, it is clear that our political institutions will not be up to the

task of designing or executing such a program. Our Merchant Class must take the lead in this incredible challenge that will lead us to equality, and not cease until we arrive there.

Apart from the obvious fact that our political institutions have been failing to correct our inequalities for hundreds of years and seem less able to address them today than at any time since Jim Crow, why should the business community assume this burden? There are two answers: 1) the peace of society, and the general prosperity of society for all its members, is the dominant driver of our consumer economy so it is in the interests of business to put the rancor, the riots, the ill will, the resentment, the negativity and the forces of destruction behind us—that's how our economy works and the business community knows it; and, 2) business is the most powerful institution in society so it morally falls upon it to bring order from our current chaos as the *ultimate corporate responsibility*. There has not been a time for centuries such as this where the business community must once again provide societal leadership. Not since the Medici of Medieval Florence and the Doges of Venice created the Merchant Class rulers who lead us through the Renaissance have we needed the dispassionate commitment to common prosperity that the cry for Reparations evokes.

What would a business lead program pushing us to true equality look like? It could look like every business setting aside two percent of annual profits for an "Equality Fund" to be used to pay for creating total equality in funding of public education regardless of the district the student lived in or the color of his/her complexion. Wealthy districts now provide homeowner subsidy payments to public school districts in many wealthy enclaves around the Nation. The Equality Fund would balance that wealth factor as one's parent's wealth should never be allowed to again determine the quality of one's education.

The Equality Fund could be used to pay to subsidize medical care for all who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods. It could pay for all the social services the disadvantaged fail to adequately receive because of their financial status and geographical location. It could finance the studies of inequality in our workplaces and instigate reforms by highlighting the best corporate behavior on behalf of all "stakeholder groups" as JUST Capital does today for the top 1000 public corporations in America. Most importantly, the Fund could pay for lawyers to enforce anti-redlining statues and to hold landlords, property owners, and the related real estate industry to standards of absolute neutrality when it comes to allowing people of color to live in the neighborhoods of their choosing. All this and much more could be done by the Fund if we truly believed that equality was the goal in everyone's best interests.

The Equality Fund is one idea. We hope and trust that others will emerge from the business community as we collectively strive to become "One Nation Under God."