

Increase Voter Enthusiasm Now

Written by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. NNPA Columnist
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Lest we forget, the price for our right to vote was life-sacrificed, blood-soaked, jail-filled, and tear-wrenched. As we approach the national elections on November 6, I am concerned that there is an urgent necessity to increase Black American voter registration, mobilization and overall enthusiasm. This is not the time for the apathy of pessimism or the dysfunction of cynicism. We should not wait until a few weeks or days before the elections to understand and affirm the critical importance of ensuring the highest possible voter turnout of Black Americans across the United States.

I disagree with those who are openly speculating and, in some instances, hoping for a low voter turnout among Black Americans. We cannot afford to let these misperceptions become a self-fulfilling prophecy. On the one hand, we know that enthusiasm in our communities is something that has to be generated and maintained, especially on the question of going to the polls to vote in record numbers once again. On the other hand, we should not forget what happened in 2008. Black Americans did in fact vote throughout the nation in all age groups in an unprecedented voter turnout and Barack Obama was elected president. It was a historic victory not just for Black Americans, but also for all Americans.

But historic progress oftentimes will cause a historic backlash of repression and reactionary backwardness, especially when the issues of race, politics, economics and global social transformation converge. Such is the case four years later as we are witnessing in real time the countless attempts to stir up old and new prejudices and stereotypes to feed the avarice and political hatred of those who want to take our nation back to the days of Jim Crow, discrimination and abject oppression. No, this is not the time to be oblivious to the well-funded tricks and mischief of rightwing sympathizers who long for a return to the days of unbridled exploitation and hopelessness.

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Yes, there are hard times today for millions of Black Americans and others who are facing the highest unemployment, housing foreclosures, disproportionate incarceration, inadequate education, and the economic crisis in too many of our families and communities. But we must not allow those who point out these persistent problems to justify a type of self-destructive “dissatisfaction” about the civic responsibility to vote as a consequence of the hardships that we may face.

Cynicism is self-destructive and counterproductive. Hopelessness and apathy are not rational options. Beware of those pundits who only have something negative to say. We have more reasons to vote in November than ever before. Do not wait for some paid political advertisement on the television or radio to get you excited about voting. Our history demands activism, focus, massive mobilization and voter readiness in every precinct in every state. Our grandparents suffered and paid an extraordinary high price for us to have the right to vote.

The systematic attempts to suppress minority votes in a growing number of states is only another indication of how important it is for us not to be bystanders and onlookers while others are investing and mobilizing their resources to insure that their respective political and economic interests are protected through the outcome of the November elections. We must fight back at any attempt to suppress our vote. Yet, the worst form of voter suppression is self-suppression or finding some personal excuse not to vote. The Black Church and the Black Press will have to accelerate the pace of arousing the spirit and consciousness of Black Americans. We have come too far to turn around now. Going backwards cannot be contemplated. The youth and the elders need to unite on the issues of getting ready for Get Out the Vote (GOTV). All of national organizations should be mobilizing now. We have to make the proper alliances and coalitions with others who share our interests and perspectives. Our common future is at stake.

It is time for a reawakening in Black America. Yes, I am optimistic and enthusiastic because I have made a decision not to rest or to relent. All of our votes are all important. But if we do not vote and if we do not go out right now and remain vigilant every day until the night of November 6, 2012 to encourage voter mobilization, then we will have been irresponsible to ourselves and to the future progress and advancement of Black Americans and all others who cry out for a better life and a better world. We did it in 2008. In 2012, let's do it again!

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