

Taxation Without REPRESENTATION

Race Taxes: Disparities evident for people of color

African American U.S. residents pay their fair share of taxes; however, they are not being adequately represented among the ranks of legislative staffers in legislatures across the U.S. What makes this so startling is that African Americans disproportionately pay higher taxes in the form of what Rothstein labels as, “race taxes”. Examples of race taxes are illustrated in disparities in home prices, whereas, African Americans are strategically sold homes at higher prices than their White, Non-Hispanic counterparts. Further, research shows that African Americans experience enhanced forms of mental taxation as a result of the legacy of slavery and current forms of systemic racism.



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Legislative staffers wield informal power that go unnoticed, but influence policies, laws and regulations that impact the lives of millions throughout the U.S. Yet for African Americans, recruitment and hiring for these influential and powerful roles are illusive in a discriminatory manner – allowing for a non-representative body within legisla-



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tures. As an example, African American staffers in the U.S. Senate make up a paltry 0.9% of top Senate staffers, but yet, are 13% of the U.S. population. In 2015, there were only two top Senate staffers that identified as African American out of 336 people that hold top staff positions. Both political parties must own structural racism and the lack of diversity among staffers. In 2015, Senate Democrats accounted for only 0.7% of African American staffers, even though the group acts as base voters for the party. Glaude and Harris reported that since 1964, 85% to 95% of African Americans have cast their ballots for the party’s standard-bearer in presidential elections. In comparison, the U.S. House of Representatives top legislative staff positions were comprised of 90% of those

that identify as White, Non-Hispanic. The lack of Black bodies in legislative offices illustrates a diversity problem that translates into policies that do not promote the well being for African-Americans. Without African American representation in legislatures, top down approaches are being utilized to craft, draft, and implement policies. The authoritative system for policies that impact African-Americans are centrally located among their Non-Hispanic White counterparts – creating a vacuum that preserves a dominant rule by a shrinking White majority.

Legislators through legislative channels hold the key to positive advancement for African-Americans in critical areas such as employment, health, criminal justice, and

voting rights, but yet, function as gatekeepers during the hiring process. Legislatures act in accordance with White supremacy by marginalizing African American staff. Riphagen suggests, "White supremacy is denied by many to exist or persist in the twenty-first century; however it can still be found as one of the casual factors of African-American oppression". Gatekeeping in legislatures is facilitated through the electoral process, whereas, more White, Non-Hispanic candidates are being elected to open seats. National Conference of State Legislatures suggests that the lack of diversity in legislatures can be contributed to the historical dominance of White legislators. In Pennsylvania, African Americans make up 10.5% of the state's population yet African American elected officials made up only 8% in the Senate and 9.3% in the House. In Minnesota, African Americans made up only 1.5% of legislators, but were 6% of the population.

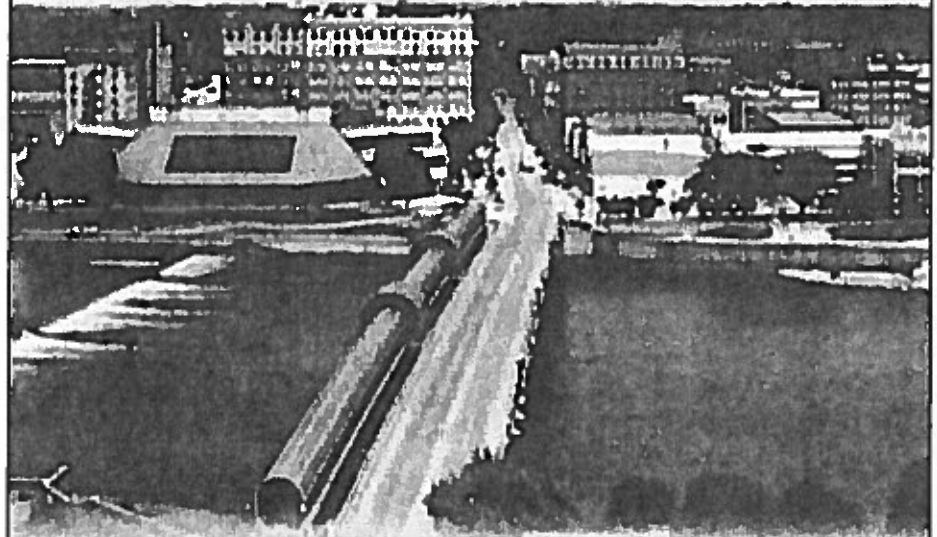
The implications associated with the failure of Congress and other legislative bodies to protect African American lives, while protecting White ones can be examined in many of the disparities in Black communities, specifically in wealth and asset accumulation. This can be traced back to access to the employment market where African Americans continue to have barriers to entry. Pew Research Center found that the median income for African American households is \$43,300, and \$71,300 for their White Non-Hispanic counterparts. When college education was factored in African Americans elevated to \$82,300, which is far behind their White, Non-Hispanic counterparts at \$106,600. Institute for Policy Studies concluded that at the current pace, it would take African Americans 228 years to amass the same amount of wealth White families have today. In a fair and just system, legislative interventions would alleviate unfair conditions that have historically kept African Americans in a perpetual marginalized state.

African Americans should be afforded fair representation; especially in institutions that make decisions that impact the nature of their very survival.



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