



# Washington Examiner

## Pete Buttigieg's mediocre anti-racism plan to win black voters

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July 11, 2019

Black voters don't like Pete Buttigieg, and he knows it.

The presidential candidate is well aware that his poor polling among African Americans is a serious problem for his campaign, so on Thursday he rolled out an anti-racism platform, named the "Douglass Plan" after the legendary civil rights leader Frederick Douglass. In a campaign email announcing the plan, Buttigieg said that "Black Americans continue to live in the shadow of systemic racism" and called for "anti-racist policies" to "close the gaps those centuries of [racist] policy created."

Now, progressive claims of racism are often frivolously invoked, especially by self-aggrandizing white politicians. Cries of systemic oppression are frequently overblown for political effect. But there are still glaring racial inequalities in modern-day America, including gaps in wealth, in treatment by our criminal justice system, and in educational opportunity.

So the South Bend, Indiana, mayor's anti-racism platform is certainly targeting a real problem. But the proposals he embraces are quite the mixed bag and include some that are highly questionable on both legal and moral grounds.

For instance, Buttigieg wants to earmark \$10 billion in taxpayer dollars to go toward investments supporting only black entrepreneurs. This is economically questionable, in that it involves government rather than the free market choosing winners and losers, and choosing them entirely based on race rather than efficacy, ingenuity, or innovation. You'd expect a Midwestern mayor to catch on to how, for decades now white business owners in nearby cities such as Chicago and Detroit have routinely gamed and abused such programs by cynically black-washing their businesses — by, say, hiring a black president or cutting in a black owner — in order to win set-aside contracts.

Such programs at the federal level are also legally dubious and possibly unconstitutional. As the Cato Institute's Walter Olson has noted, conditioning government grants based on race could potentially violate the core constitutional right to equal treatment under the law.

Buttigieg also wants to increase funding for historically black colleges and universities. This has traditionally been an area of bipartisan agreement. President Trump has supported HBCUs vociferously, as educational institutions that uplift millions of African Americans are worth investing in. But the \$25 billion Buttigieg has in mind might be excessive.

Mayor Pete also seeks to legalize marijuana, reduce the prison population, and expunge the record of all those previously convicted on marijuana-related drug charges. This is an excellent

idea and long-overdue. It's simply nonsensical to jail people for smoking marijuana, which hurts no one else, and Buttigieg is completely correct that the war on drugs has disproportionately and needlessly harmed minority communities.

But things really get weird where the candidate includes of invocations of "reproductive justice" — the evasive way of saying "abortion" — in his anti-racism plan. This is just nonsense. Abortion has vastly disproportionately reduced the black population in the U.S. (by up to 19 million). In New York City and Washington, D.C., more black babies are aborted every year than actually born. It stands to reason, Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger was explicitly racist, viewing abortion as a eugenic tool for culling undesirables.

We also have to talk about what Buttigieg's plan does *not* include.

Any serious plan to uplift black Americans would include ample support for school choice programs such as charter schools and tuition vouchers that overwhelmingly help minority students, and which African Americans overwhelmingly support. It was probably naive to expect that Buttigieg's "Douglass Plan" might include something about education reform, given that it says, "you aren't free if your zip code, name, and race determine your quality of life."

But nope, there's no support in the plan for school choice, or anything really that could be seen as breaking with the Democratic Party's line on education. Compared to Buttigieg, President Barack Obama was frankly courageous in this regard. Mayor Pete is clearly not serious about pursuing racial justice if he wants to bow to teachers' unions and leave African American students in failing public schools, stripping black families of educational opportunity.

Additionally, the candidate's proposal makes no mention of occupational licensing reform, again, an issue where Obama had made progress against the Democratic party line. This is a glaring omission. Such restrictions have a disproportionate effect on nonwhite entrepreneurs and reduce America's annual economic output by \$200 billion.

All in all, the "Douglass Plan" is a microcosm of Buttigieg's entire campaign: It's got some good intentions, but it's lacking in courage and steeped in tired, bad ideas.