

LEWIS DIUGUID JANUARY 19, 2016 11:39 AM

Lewis Diuguid: Lack of diversity in Oscar nominations sign of larger exclusion problem in U.S., world

HIGHLIGHTS

Boycott of Academy Awards sought by black filmmaker Spike Lee and black actress Jada Pinkett Smith

Growing wealth gap reported in U.S. and throughout the world signals loss of financial, political clout of people of color





BY LEWIS DIUGUID

ldiuguid@kcstar.com

Them that's got shall have

Them that's not shall lose

So the Bible says and it still is news

Mama may have, Papa may have

But God bless the child that's got his own, that's got his own....

Many of jazz singer Billie Holiday's recordings are haunting and timeless like "God Bless the Child."

It speaks to the current uproar among some African Americans over the second straight year of all-white acting nominees for the Academy Awards. Filmmaker Spike Lee and Jada Pinkett Smith are among the people who've said they will boycott the 88th Academy Awards on Feb. 28 because of the ongoing lack of diversity.

Isn't it amazing that Hollywood's grandest event occurs during Black History Month, honoring no black actors?

Instead of this being 2016, the Oscar announcements might as well have come out during Billie Holiday's career from the 1930s until her death into the 1950s when segregation was the still law of the land and black performers were mostly ignored. Oddly, 48 years after the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. the United States is as segregated now as it was when he was alive.

The painful issue of people of color being excluded from mainstream America surfaced on Monday as the country celebrated the national holiday for the civil rights' leader's birth. It goes hand-in-hand with many other ongoing racial disparities in America.

It's why the Black Lives Matter movement has been embraced nationwide and on college campuses after the Aug. 9, 2014, police shooting of unarmed, African American, 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. Too many people of color in all walks of life are

feeling unarmed and vulnerable.

SPIKE LEE, JADA PINKETT SMITH BOYCOTTING ACADEMY AWARDS

Hollywood and much of the rest of this country pay attention to those who control the wealth and leave out those without money and the political power to get it. You can just hear Billie Holiday's "God Bless the Child" playing in the background.

The Institute on Assets and Social Policy reports that as the United States is rapidly becoming a more multicultural nation, it also is experiencing growing racial and ethnic wealth gap. It's not an accident.

"The U.S. racial wealth gap is substantial and is driven by public policy decisions," the institute's report says. Survey of Income and Program Participation data collected in 2011 showed that the median white household had \$111,146 in wealth holdings, compared with just \$7,113 for the median African American household and \$8,348 for the median Latino household.

The causes include continuing redlining in home ownership for people of color, a vast retreat in desegregation efforts in public schools and communities — all shaped by an accumulation of decades of public policies that gift whites with advantages. One solution involves ending disparities in home ownership rates. Currently "73 percent of white households owned their own homes in 2011, only 47 percent of Latinos and 45 percent of blacks were homeowners."

"In addition, black and Latino homeowners saw less return in wealth on their investment in home ownership: for every \$1 in wealth that accrues to median black households as a result of home ownership, median white households accrue \$1.34; meanwhile for every \$1 in wealth that accrues to median Latino households as a result of home ownership, median white households accrue \$1.54," the report said.

Eliminating the disparity in college graduation rates and the return on an investment in a college degree also would help end the wealth gap. "In 2011, 34 percent of whites had completed four-year college degrees compared to just 20 percent of blacks and 13 percent of Latinos," the institute reported.

"In addition, black and Latino college graduates saw a lower return on their degrees than white graduates: for every \$1 in wealth that accrues to median black households associated with a college degree, median white households accrue \$11.49," the report said.

“Meanwhile for every \$1 in wealth that accrues to median Latino households associated with a college degree, median white households accrue \$13.33.

“If public policy successfully eliminated racial disparities in college graduation rates, median black wealth would grow \$1,313 and the wealth gap between black and white households would shrink 1 percent. Median Latino wealth would grow \$3,528, and the wealth gap with white households would shrink 3 percent.

If public policy successfully equalized the return to college graduation, median black wealth would grow \$10,786 and the wealth gap between black and white households would shrink 10 percent. Median Latino wealth would grow \$5,878, and the wealth gap with white households would shrink 6 percent.”

Income disparities are a continuing problem. The median white household in 2011 had an income of \$50,400 a year compared with \$32,028 for blacks and \$36,840 for Latinos.

“If public policy successfully eliminated racial disparities in income, median black wealth would grow \$11,488 and the wealth gap between black and white households would shrink 11 percent,” the report said. “Median Latino wealth would grow \$8,765, and the wealth gap with white households would shrink 9 percent.

“If public policy successfully equalized the return to income, so that each additional dollar of income going to black and Latino households was converted to wealth at the same rate as white households, median black wealth would grow \$44,963 and median Latino wealth would grow \$51,552. This would shrink the wealth gap with white households by 43 and 50 percent respectively.”

It’s also a global problem. Oxfam and the public relations firm Edelman reported Monday on the growing wealth inequities. Oxfam noted that only 62 people own the same wealth as half of the people on Earth. It used to be 388 people just five years ago. The global Great Recession made the wealth disparity worse.

Since 2010, the wealth of the poorest half of the planet’s population — 3.6 billion people — has plunged by a trillion, or 41 percent. But the wealth of the super-rich has risen by about a half trillion dollars, or to \$1.76 trillion, Oxfam reports.

Women are disproportionately affected by the inequality — 53 of the 62 are men. Tax havens benefiting multinational corporations and rich individuals are largely behind the growing wealth disparity, enabling them to shake paying their fair share of taxes. The data

was released ahead of this week's World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos.

“Oxfam is calling for urgent action to tackle the extreme inequality crisis which threatens to undermine the progress made in tackling poverty during the last quarter of a century,” the report said. “Had inequality within countries not grown between 1990 and 2010, an extra 200 million people would have escaped poverty.”

The Oxfam report adds: “Action to recover the missing billions lost to tax havens needs to be accompanied by a commitment on the part of governments to invest in health care, schools and other vital public services that make such a big difference to the lives of the poorest people. Governments should also take action to ensure that work pays for those at the bottom as well as for those at the top — including moving minimum wage rates towards a living wage and tackling the pay gap between men and women.”

But with the U.S. and global political will lacking to do anything about the disparities, cue up Billie Holiday's song, “God Bless the Child.” It could be the theme song of the World Economic Forum.

Lewis Diuguid: 816-234-4723, ldiuguid@kcstar.com, @DiuguidLewis



MORE LEWIS DIUGUID

YOU MAY LIKE

Sponsored Links by Taboola

6 Ways to Unify Your Teams to Achieve Customer Success [eBook}

Salesforce

Teeth Damaging Habits You Aren't Aware Of

ComedyTrash