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LET BLACK VOTERS  
BE BLACK VOTERS

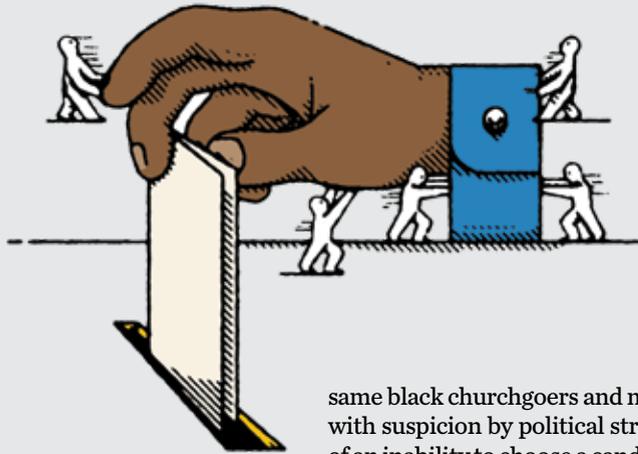
From the South Carolina Democratic primary onward, the votes for the presidency cast by black churchgoers will be criticized by many white people. Even now, black churchgoers' feelings are speculated about in the press, like in-progress crimes announced on a police scanner.

Media and election pundits ask: "Are they going to choose Joe Biden because of his relationship with Barack Obama? Are they going to go for Elizabeth Warren because of her plan to give \$50 billion to historically black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions? Are they going to bypass Pete Buttigieg because he's gay?"

The latter question is the most problematic—an attempt to deem all black churchgoers as homophobic, as if homophobia is something no other racial, ethnic, or religious group has played a part in; as if there's no such thing as the black grandfather who accepts his gay grandson; the black grandmother who always asks how her grandson's boyfriend is doing; or the black grandmother who puts on her "good wig" to hang out with said boyfriend when he visits the South. All three are my Christian grandparents, and they're not alone.

But the most problematic aspect of the Buttigieg question is what it reveals about white sight: Black churchgoers of the electorate are seen as tools to bring about a desired election result, and scapegoats if the election doesn't go the white way.

A little more than two years ago, black voters in Alabama were praised by pundits for electing Doug Jones to the U.S. Senate over Roy Moore, who faced allegations of child molestation and other sexual assaults. Jones toured black churches in the state, which likely helped him win. Now, ahead of the 2020 presidential election, those



same black churchgoers and more in the South are eyed with suspicion by political strategists who accuse them of an inability to choose a candidate based on a platform.

The truth is, black churchgoers of the electorate can vote any way they like, and many white people will still find a way to abstract them as unintelligent animals. Even if black churchgoers help elect the first gay president of the United States, they will eventually be hit with another accusation. "They didn't vote for X because they don't understand foreign policy. They didn't vote for Y because they don't know economics. They didn't vote for Z because they believe women should submit to their husbands."

It's no different than the debunked "science" of phrenology that said Africans were dumb because of the shape of their skulls. "Depend upon it my good friend," Dr. Charles Caldwell wrote in 1837, "the Africans must have a master."

Black churchgoers of the electorate: Vote how you want, what feels right. After all, you have always possessed a stronger moral vision than many of your white counterparts. Before there were abolitionists, there were your ancestors, who said to themselves as they slaved on plantations: "This is immoral." Their descendants said the same during the civil rights movement. All have gathered in churches made from shanties or—once blown up by the Klan—piles of rubble that resembled shanties. All sang and sobbed, praised and mourned, and tapped into a level of the Spirit many white Christians don't even know exists.

That's the sort of wisdom I'd rather put my trust in. ♦

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