



# BLACKLASH

*The Africana Collective*

REPORT NO. 5

Ballot or the Bullet? Voting as a Tool for What in 2020?



## INTRODUCTION

In their new book, *Steadfast Democrats: How Social Forces Shape Black Political Behavior* (Princeton University Press, 2020), Ismail White and Chryl Laird examine why 80 to 90 percent of peoples of African ancestry (they used “Black”) identify politically as Democrats and yet almost one-third identify ideologically as conservatives but don’t vote Republican. The authors point to the specificity of the “Black experience” but argue more forcefully that social pressure, usually within this “Black” political bloc, is key to understanding their dogged support for the Democratic party. If they are accurate in the analysis, what are its implications for voting in 2020? Assuming this solid yet divided support in electoral politics, what is at stakes if peoples of African ancestry do not vote according to historical patterns or sociological statistics? In other words, voting is a tool for what in 2020? As the presidential election looms around the corner, join us in this pressure-cooked moment for perspectives and analysis.

*Backlash: The Africana Collective* (BTAC) engages in interdisciplinary research to provide analysis and recommendations on a range of issues affecting the African(a) world—linked communities with peoples of African ancestry. Using our collective knowledge and skills, as well as our grounding as thinkers, educators, activists, organizers, and parents, our objective is to support and inform action toward safeguarded humane development throughout the African world. We are independent in our funding, research, and directives, allowing us to work decidedly in the best interests of said communities.

Each month, we consider one topical issue as a collective. In the process, we prepare individual statements, meet (virtually) to hammer out our findings, then prepare our report. That report is then shared with the African world via online outlets and through various networks a week prior to a (virtual) town hall meeting, where we invite members of the African world community to join us, debate, (dis)agree, and come away with perspectives that inform collective action. We strongly request that all attendees at the town hall read the report **beforehand**. This way, you are an active participant in shaping your own views and subsequent decisions. We encourage you to sign up, or register, for the town hall, so we may keep you abreast of upcoming events, key resources, and ways to translate the reports’ ideas into collective betterment scaled to wherever you are and with whom you have to work.

In this thought paper, report no. 4, we consider the topical issues surrounding debates about blackness and pan-Africanism. Join us for the virtual town hall, titled “Is Blackness and Pan-Africanism Relevant in the Age of Chadwick Boseman?” on Wednesday, September 9, 2020, at 6 pm EST/10 pm GMT.



## PERSPECTIVE: DR. JARED BALL

Despite many attempts to rebrand, or reinterpret him Malcolm X could not have been clearer in his approach to the vote:

...we [the OAAU] will start immediately a voter-registration drive to make an Independent voter; we propose to support and/or organize political clubs, to run Independent candidates for office, and to support any Afro-American already in office who answers to and is responsible to the Afro-American community.<sup>1</sup>

Malcolm X was not advocating the prevailing “lesser of evils” approach. Malcolm X was not advocating the reduction of our platforms to a single-issue defense for supporting one or another political party whose histories and contemporary behavior make plain their disinterest in the freedom or equality of any group, much less Black people. I am a Malcolm X voter. To the extent to which electoral politics can or should be used at all toward genuine revolutionary change it can only be on the standard set by Malcolm X and his Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU); an appropriate standard for any group seeking actual political power, or anything akin to sovereignty. And for what else, other than power, is there to struggle?

However, today, and far too often by people nominally of the “Left” or radically African-centered world, support for establishment, corporate, anti-Black, anti-African parties, candidates, and policies – justified by some inane claims about protecting one or another “right” – has come to dominate our political discourse and with little to no room for debate or discussion. In fact, many of those granted (lucrative) access to White and Black mainstream commercial media not only make these arguments but do so while attacking those on their political Left as if there is no logic beyond voting for, in this case, Joe Biden. This, of course, is their “[Price of the Ticket](#)” of access to such media spaces where no other form of political conversations are ever allowed.

Iconic Leftists, from across the Black political spectrum, continue to make the case that we have to vote the lesser of evil and do so every four years as if this is the election we must save for the good of the world. This has been said for decades. Most recently we were told to “Vote or Die” to prevent George Bush, Jr. Now we are told we must prevent the “existential crisis” represented by Trump while voting for a Biden campaign that now promotes itself using its now close ties to that very same Bush administration. It is just never the time to work toward, even advocate, the Malcolm X politics none would publicly decry. Never is it the right time to support, even acknowledge, the existence of other political parties. Here these “radical” Black pundits sound no different than did Michelle Obama this week when saying that we have no time for “protest” votes going to other parties. Her party won’t actually do anything for anyone but somehow the “wasted” vote is for someone else’s.

Today, we hear from, for example, [Angela Davis](#) who has come out famously in support of Biden, and Obama before him, while simultaneously representing to many the most radical of anti-capitalist and pro-woman

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<sup>1</sup> Jared A. Ball and Todd Steven Burroughs. *A Lie of Reinvention: Correcting Manning Marable's Malcolm X*. Black Classic Press. Kindle Edition.



politics. Dr. Cornel West recently [tweeted](#) a need to defend the US election in the “great tradition” of radicals like DuBois, Robeson, and Lorraine Hansberry, as though these heroic figures in their own lives and work supported mainstream politics and politicians, as if defending a Biden election is somehow part of this “great tradition” of Black radicalism. Where then is room for a discussion of what these people actually said, advocated, or did vis-à-vis the vote? This would, however, make West’s defense of Biden, Obama, Clinton, Sanders, etc. impossible. And even the African-centered intellectual giant Dr. [Greg Carr](#) has himself taken to twitter and his commercial media spots with Karen Hunter and Roland Martin to aggressively defend a vote for Biden and with vitriol only for those who would raise questions of this from his political Left.

And nowhere is there legitimate debate. Commercial media spaces will allow for conservative and reactionary conversations and for the nominally radical to score points off their rightwing colleagues. This is helpful in feeding the supporters of these “progressive” voices enough chum to keep them in liberal waters. But when challenged at all their refrain is to return safely to the confines of political canards and tropes like “defending abortion,” “LGBTQ, and minority rights,” or “liberal federal judge and supreme court” (SCOTUS) appointments. And worse, none will produce anything other than the aforementioned talking points when asked for an actual detailed argument which explains how any of these issues is worth losing universal healthcare, redistribution of created wealth, job and income protections/guarantees, an end to wars, mass surveillance and incarceration, student debt, the move toward drug legalization, and certainly the freedom of our political prisoners.

The absence of debate which includes left critics of voting or Left-of-blue politics is astounding, matched only be the condescension and ignorance around the issue. Just using the absurdity of the often repeated claim that we need to vote “Blue No Matter Who” to protect federal or SCOTUS judges I am making use of a [recent article](#) written by Samuel Moyn, professor of law at Yale. Moyn’s overarching point is that the liberal emphasis on these courts both does not return the promises of that support and, more importantly, walks us away from democracy and our ability to pass laws via Congress which would offer and protect the rights we think can only be protected by an august judiciary. I intend to use Moyn’s article and the particular canard of protecting SCOTUS or the federal judiciary to summarize my argument that: a) George Jackson was right in asking what good is the vote after the fact of monopoly capital? and b) why are we persistently encouraged by our punditry class and apparent radicals to consistently vote the lesser of evils, rather than c) radically engaging the vote perhaps in a variety of ways meant to build cohesion, political education and to heighten contradictions; i.e. becoming “Malcolm X Voters.”

For all the talk of defending a handful of “gains” or from preventing something worse, things have worsened or failed ever to really improve and, again, current patterns of voting have only seen material reality devolve from relative highs of a few decades ago which coincided with an international and domestic revolutionary activity largely absent today. Quoting a bit at length from Moyn:

On race, to take the most romanticized accomplishment, school integration in the South didn’t genuinely begin until a full ten years after the Supreme Court’s landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), precisely because it ultimately required federal legislative action. And yet, more than sixty years after *Brown*, apartheid is institutionalized functionally rather than formally. There are a mere three years of



progress (between 1964 and 1967) to show for those running victory laps for the judiciary. Distressingly, data shows that school integration in the North, achieved only partially there to begin with, has been even more undone.

It would be lovely to rely on juristocrats if they patrolled the procedures of the democratic process itself, making sure winners could not lock in their gains by gaming the rules in elections. Surely the judicial affirmation in the United States of basic principles—since they are absent from the Constitution itself—that everyone’s vote ought to be treated equally is worth flagging. ***But the judiciary has never done much to reinforce the representation of racial minorities.*** Its more recent track record on this subject has been particularly abysmal.

Then there is class. The drive for the moderation of economic inequality was the central explanation for the democratic victory of progressives under Roosevelt, and the success of their campaign essentially required judges to get out of the way. But even at the high tide of their political ascendancy, liberals couldn’t get the Supreme Court to commit to distributive entitlements of any kind. Neither a welfare state for the least advantaged, nor broader egalitarian justice in the country, is there for even the most creative judges to find under the Constitution’s authority—even assuming a transformed bench.

In short, progressives have little to lose and much to gain by leaving juristocracy to the enemies of democracy. Abandoning judicial politics in a kind of “unilateral disarmament” may seem like a foolish move. But liberals have already lost the race for the heavy weaponry of judicial control of democracy, and they can advocate for the people more consistently and less hypocritically if they press their policies democratically. There is simply no way to restrict judicial activism to one’s preferred causes any more than you can introduce a weapon in a fight with the guarantee that it will only hurt your enemies.

Lately the enthusiasm for judicial empowerment has taken the form of unseemly heroine worship, with Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor elevated to the status of secular saints. It is a kind of *juristocratic feminism* among legal elites to match the reigning neoliberal one among the professional class in general. But instead of merely reviling judges on the other side of the ideological divide while worshiping one’s own, in a pantheon of angels and demons, any serious democrat should reject the religion of the judiciary itself. Other liberals trying to get through a dark night are clinging to the hope that, cajoled by strategic genius Elena Kagan, John Roberts might tack to the center in a few crucial cases. The truth is that the prospect of a “centrist” coalition is more of an anxious fantasy than a political opportunity. *Even if it works, it is a distinct improvement on full-scale reaction at the Supreme Court in the same way that a chronic disease is better than a terminal diagnosis* (emphasis added).

Many reform schemes circle around restoring partisan equilibrium and undergirding the “legitimacy” of the institution that right-wing hijinks have eroded. That approach would



be less embarrassing had liberals not spent generations ceding reform arguments, like the democratic premise itself, to the right, in their zeal to present the Supreme Court as a legitimate source of rule as long as they controlled it. Yet the real problem with the liberal cause is not really that it lost control of the judicial power it built but that it built it in the first place.

The point made by [Samuel Moyn](#), that outsized power given to SCOTUS discourages society's own democratic self-governance and derives in recent history mostly from liberal fantasy of the court, reflects so much of our own confusion over Black liberation and electoral politics. When we are encouraged away from radical engagement or *disengagement* from the vote due to a need to protect courts we are being further encouraged to our own abdication of self-governance and sovereignty. Moyn again:

It has been a disaster for the democratic premise that the people themselves choose their own arrangements, shunting decision-making to *a council of elders* supposedly possessed of unique wisdom. And in exchange for its antidemocratic premises, juristocracy has not delivered the goods that popular interests and needs require. Only democratic politics can (emphasis added).

Even Moyn seems to know what many of our brightest Africanists do not, that our empty and disorganized transfer of power to another's "council of elders" assures that our own potential power will be transferred as well.

But juristocracy is a congenitally American malady. Turning to judges as secret agents of political transformation is quite another matter. When the U.S. Constitution first became attractive in the late nineteenth century, it was among conservatives facing the frightening prospect of mass suffrage and finding in James Madison's handiwork a device for potentially weathering the coming tempest.

And who was Madison other than the enslaving brute who divined a system of "representation" which would assure forever that the vote could not be used to make significant change by the aggrieved and oppressed created by Madison's protected "minority" of rich White men?

In the end, the crux of my own question for us, what "gains" have we really achieved or can hope to achieve by maintaining current mainstream adherence to blind and politically empty voting patterns, is summed up again by Moyn:

The returns for converting democratic politics into judicial selection have been very meager for the left. The point is not to gainsay some good things that judges did at the zenith of liberal power. But it is worth asking whether the courts were necessary to the outcomes—and whether it was worth depending on an antidemocratic power that the right has now turned against progressives.



## PERSPECTIVE: DR. KWASI KONADU

As election day approaches on Tuesday, November 3, there is the idea that the (f)act of voting is a tool, but for what? Voting presents us—or is presented to us—as a quintessential right, safeguarded by the blood of fallen troops and shrouded in myths of liberty and justice for all... whom matter. Whether we accept or reject this presentation, we must admit voting as a performative act or a tool through which to direct action needs to be framed in history. “The great force of history,” James Baldwin reminds us, “comes from the fact that we *carry it* within us,” and that “history is literally *present* in all that we do.” But what has been carried into the present under the guise of voting and, through voting, what do we keep ever-present? We start where history nudges us to look—ancient Rome. The socio-political and economic structures regulating U.S. society, and around a globe molested by western European violence, are plagiarized forms of Roman law and institutions. Their story is a mirror to us.

Whether we cry for or critique the idea of democracy, know that it failed in Rome as it did in Athens, Greece, its alleged homeland. Commoners were represented by delegates to a General Assembly (GA) elected by wards within the city, through oral votes that were then counted via roll call. The Senate made up of old and wealthy men came to dominate this assembly. The GA is your House of Representatives, which has 435 members, and the Senate, well, is the Senate, with 100 members. The U.S. Senate still has more (relative) power than the House. Ordinary Roman citizens seeking membership in the Senate usually identified with the interests of the upper class rather than the commoners. In the first U.S. presidential election the voters were virtually landowning and chattel holding white men. White males are the only demographic with unencumbered universal suffrage. Aristotle’s politics supported the view that women were inferior to and should be ruled by men, and enslaved families often were divided and sold to work on Roman plantations. Sounds eerily familiar. The Roman class system was based on property, which included women, and the rape of women was not an offense punishable by law. It is nearly impossible to find *one* legal case where white men have been punished by law for the rape of women of African ancestry in the United States.

In the age of U.S. empire, it is important to remember Rome’s expansion and the imposition of its ideas, institutions, and language were facilitated by networks of soft and lethal power. Rome’s imperial rule and increased territorial expansion led, however, to civil wars, constant social upheaval, and the eventual collapse of the republic. At the heart of these were struggles between conservatives who questioned expansion (or globalization) and the imperialists who desired expansion and wealth. The latter won, but hedging that way accelerated the failure of the republic. Julius Caesar tried to establish a monarchy—not dissimilar from Trump’s total authority claims—through the military and nationalist politics, but neighboring and external (Germanic) groups halted his efforts, and successors failed on account of civil upheavals and coups. Imperial rule slowly but steeply declined.

As the Roman empire deteriorated, tyrannical leaders and chaos plunged Rome into the obvious: that neither reforms—in our case, anti-racist workshops, police bias training—nor the spread of a new theology—the religion of whiteness, in our case—would save it. If the United States is our Rome, do we use the tool of voting to save



it? I'm unconvinced by the Dave Chappelle nod that "we should do it" because "this is your country, too. It is incumbent upon us... to save our country." Voting is not power, but the act of voting flirts with the illusion of participating in power—power that enshrines the belief that its system of governance works. Said differently, all systems—be they economic, social or political—are built around belief. They are as real to the extent we believe in them. This is precisely why citizens and residents must be constantly assured there are flaws, but the system works; the elections were hacked and reframed by foreign actors, but the elections were fair because the system, yet again, works. What works is belief. Voting, regarding of *what* or *who* one votes for, is an act of belief. And though some may quibble about the absence of a viable and contending third party, even if there was one, voting and the belief it authenticates would remain entrenched. Voting narrows our political vision to the scripted options on the menu, foreclosing the possibility of creating our own menu or another restaurant.

For those who don't want to believe, there is, however, another choice besides voting Democrat or Republican. The choice is voting by not casting a ballot. On the one hand, we may have to bite the bullet and use an intentional non-vote, which is to say we're opting out of the belief in things unseen and unrealized—the "more perfect union." Plus, there is no "right" to vote etched in the U.S. Constitution. This leaves us all with no greater or lesser, right or wrong choice. On the other hand, an intentional no-vote has practical implications. Enough of these can lead to a tie or neither party candidates reaching an absolute majority of electoral votes ( 270); in that case, a two-thirds majority of the House must decide for president and the Senate the same for a vice-president, according to the 12<sup>th</sup> amendment. But if the House is unable to do so by March 4, the vice-president becomes president and the Senate chooses from a shortlist the vice-president. What happens if neither body are able nor willing to muster a two-thirds for any candidate? We don't know. The country has yet to go there. We know the tie between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr in election of 1800 caused a crisis, resolved by the creation of the 12<sup>th</sup> amendment. But perhaps such crisis anew is what's needed to unhinge the belief and the system it props up through voting.

## PERSPECTIVE: DR. MJIBA FREHIWOT

***Voting in America is as liberating to African/Black people as voting for one's favorite reggae artist.*** This opening statement might seem harsh and to some offensive—even more some Black/African people may respond that our ancestors fought and died for the Vote. However, I contend that voting in a country in which you have an oppressive relationship to the mode of production, means of production and in which you are repressed yields little results. The fight for the vote was a tactic by the likes of Kwame Touré, Martin Luther King Jr. and Medgar Evers to struggle for human rights and not necessarily civil rights.

The act of voting itself is not useless when voting occurs in a nation or state that is truly democratic and has structures that ensures that the people control their material and immaterial resources. In these spaces voting may be heralded as one of the keys to ensuring that everyone has a voice. However, in nations where 5% of the



population controls most of the resources voting becomes less powerful. Voting is used as an instrument of the elite to justify looting and pillaging. The single act of voting in local or national elections is promoted as the 95% having a voice in the economic, political, and social system. ***Unfortunately, nothing can be further from the truth!***

Voting is a human right! Being denied the vote is a signal that one's human rights have been violated. However, if your vote reinforces your oppression have your human rights not been violated?

Voting is promoted as an act that is so powerful that when wielded properly can be the catalyst to revolution. This act is not only far from a revolutionary act, but it is also a vehicle for the ruling class to maintain the status quo. The propaganda around the power of the vote is so engrained in the fabric of the nation that few challenge its efficacy. This is primarily due to the lack of political education of most "Americans". There is a direct relationship between formal and informal education and propaganda around the relationship of everyday people to the development of the nation. Propaganda targets communities differently depending on their history and relationship to society. For example, this propaganda speaks to the historically inaccurate birthright of people of European descent (White Americans) and their duty to ensure that they safeguard their nation. The same propaganda machine spits out a message to African descendants about the hard earned right to vote that many of their ancestors fought for. Voting as a sign of Americanness is pushed towards immigrants and descendants of immigrants. Lastly, this machine completely ignores the indigenous people of the western hemisphere hoping that they *will forget that this land that we call America is actually their land.*

This election season there has been a call to action for everyone to get out and vote to oust Trump. This is primarily due to the belief that he is a danger to American democracy. Trump is not a danger to democracy in America but a true reflection of the very foundation of the nation.

The feeling of desperation around this election reminds me of the excitement around the election of Obama in 2008. President Obama was projected to be the savior of Black/African people in America and beyond. Instead he turned out to be an American President whose primary responsibility was safeguarding the oppressive and repressive nature of America. This also resulted in an increase of the United States Africa Command. "The scale of military intervention made a decisive jump during Obama's tenure, with a 200 percent increase in military missions during his tenure, as well as a widening presence of Defense Department staff into State Department realms. For example, Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti became host to 2,000 military personnel, while U.S. Department of Defense staff were assigned to U.S. embassies across Africa, reflecting the enlarged scope of anti-terror activities" (Wengraf, 2016).

**The facade of democracy in America is reinforced by the false notion that voting is at the heart of democracy. Democracy is a contested concept that takes on multiple forms depending on the system it is operating in. Western democracy is interconnected with the political and economic system of capitalism.** "Procedural (formal, liberal, capitalist or bourgeois) democracy is the political form of neoliberalism, and it dominates political thought and state practice today. This modality of management of class relations is currently in crisis, expressed through the evacuation of politics, the erosion of civil liberties and the emergence of authoritarian governance" (Ayers & Saad-Filho, 2015, p. 597).



Voting is a tool to legitimize American democracy but most importantly it is used to support the capitalist economic system that promotes racism and White Supremacy. When communities challenge the treatment and repression of African people, they are told to vote to change elected officials. The narrative spewed to protestors, activists and organizations fighting against the death of African people is to vote in progressive officials locally and nationally. It is believed that these progressive candidates will somehow transform the system to make it more democratic and representative of the people. The truth is that America is built on principles of slavery, murder, segregation, police brutality and continued repression.

Voting is an act of reform that may provide temporary relief for a few people but only reinforces the system of repression. Kwame Touré suggests that we need organization and not just mobilization to fight this long-protracted war.

The Bullet is much more than an actual bullet it is the figurative bullet. This figurative bullet must be pointed at the larger capitalist system much like an actual gun we need the container to hold the content. This container is Pan-Africanism and the content is organization.

## PERSPECTIVE: DR. TODD STEVEN BURROUGHS

\*My perspective comes from a newspaper article published in May 2014. I think it presents and represents the values that I want to articulate about direct attempts at Black-Brown democracy. I have corrected my original error: Baraka was elected as, and remains in 2020, Newark's 40<sup>th</sup> mayor. [And this link, from a September 2020 episode of "PBS' Frontline," shows how that vote mattered.](#)

### ***\*AN ELECTION ANALYSIS: Amiri Baraka's Son Becomes Mayor of Newark, New Jersey By Earning It***

NEWARK, N.J.—Ras Baraka, one of the sons of the late poet/playwright Amiri Baraka, handily beat rival Shavar Jeffries Tuesday night to become the next mayor of his father's city. How he did it was no mystery to those paying attention.

The mayor-elect paid tribute to his father, who died in January, and his mother, Amina Baraka, who was nearby off-stage at the Robert Treat Hotel here.

"I know that my father's spirit is in this room today, that he is here with us, and I want to say 'Thank you' to him for believing in me up into his last days of his life, and him passing out flyers even on his hospital bed. He fought all the way to the end," he said to his jubilant supporters.



To Amina Baraka he said, “Happy Mother’s Day, Ma. You deserve this more than me. My mother’s whole life has been Newark. She has struggled and fought, and even (fought) with all of us to make sure we go right and do right by the city of Newark.”

Using unofficial Essex County Clerk’s Office results available at deadline, Baraka’s vote total was 23,416 (53.73 percent of the vote) to Jeffries’ 20,062 (46.03 percent).

“Today we told them, all over the state of New Jersey, that the people of Newark are not for sale,” he said, referring to the estimated \$2 million that Jeffries’ financial supporters, many of them anonymous donors, poured into his rival’s campaign.

Baraka threw shirts to his supporters that read, “I am the mayor.” His slogan was, “When I become mayor, we become mayor.” He told the crowd to celebrate, and then get ready to “roll their sleeves up and get ready to be the mayor.”

The mayor and the hundreds of supporters then left the hotel and marched to Newark City Hall.

Baraka, 44, will become Newark’s 40th mayor at his July 1 inauguration.

Newark, an overwhelmingly Democratic city, has no party primary, with officials instead elected on citywide tickets. This situation allowed [Jeffries](#) and [Baraka](#), both Democrats, to [slug it out](#) over who was best qualified to reduce crime, spur the city’s economic development and fight to repair [the city’s struggling school system](#), the latter controlled by the state for the past 19 years.

[The election](#) is seen as important because Newark is the heart of predominantly Democratic Essex County, an important collection of votes for anyone running for New Jersey governor.

Since Newark elections have now been populated by candidates relatively new to the city, the prickly question of “authenticity” has become a real one here in the last 20 years.

A mayoral candidate now has to prove himself sufficiently Black (and soon, sufficiently Latino), urban and progressive. [U.S. Sen. Cory Booker \(D-N.J.\)](#), the previous mayor, promised new energy and new investments, but he still had to earn his way from Yale Law School to the Newark City Council, and eventually the mayor’s chair, vote by brick.

When the mayoral race narrowed to two, Baraka kept jackhammering at the main fault line of the Shavar Jeffries campaign: its open hubris.

Jeffries may have been born in Newark, but he appeared from [Seton Hall University Law School](#) fully formed and fully funded—[by anonymous donors](#). Jeffries served on the Newark Advisory School Board and was president of the Newark Boys and Girls Club, two very important city positions.

But that just doesn’t carry the same juice as being on the council, where a councilmember is directly responsible for Newarkers’ lives and where people test his or her power and commitment to the city’s decaying working-class neighborhoods and the people who live in them.



The campaign had the atmosphere of history around it because of the obvious question: could the son of [Amiri Baraka](#), a Black communist poet and playwright who was beaten by police during [the 1967 Newark insurrection](#), be elected Newark mayor?

Until his transition into ancestry this past January, [Amiri Baraka was known as a living legend in Black literature, and an historic figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century Black politics](#). But to many Newarkers on the street for decades, [he](#) was known as “that Black radical” and that old, cranky guy who sponsored poetry and jazz concerts in the basement of his home or in downtown city parks.

The question became less significant the more time spent on the Newark streets. Baraka received no “sympathy vote” because of his father (or his slain sister Shani, for that matter). Newarkers who were interviewed kept mentioning that they knew, or knew of, Baraka and didn’t know Jeffries.

[Baraka, the city’s South Ward councilmember until Tuesday night, got the support of the people because of his consistent commitment to them for 23 years.](#)

As a deputy mayor, he accepted only a salary of \$1, rejecting the doubling of his school district income. At the last debate, he said that, as mayor, he will actually receive a pay cut from his combined council and high school principal posts.

People on the street notice things like that. They also know well their elected representatives, children’s teachers and principals, and the principles all hold.

[The radical Howard University student activist](#) who returned to Newark and became a city schoolteacher, and later vice-principal and principal, taught outsiders, and reminded returning sons, that many, many Newarkers are actually committed to living here.

That radical faith in maintaining and renovating the old bricks of his city, like [the younger Baraka’s ability as a poet](#), may be partly hereditary, but, in the end, he earned every vote he got every day between his 1991 Howard graduation and Tuesday night.



## TOWN HALL AND RESOURCES

### Town Hall

October 28, 2020 at 6 pm: <https://www.crowdcast.io/e/ballot-or-the-bullet>

### Resources

#### Books and Articles

Ayers, A. J., & Saad-Filho, A. (2015). Democracy against neoliberalism: Paradoxes, limitations, transcendence. *Critical Sociology*, 41(4-5), 597-618.

David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009)

Franz Wieacker, "The Importance of Roman Law for Western Civilization and Western Legal Thought," *B.C. Int'l & Comp. L. Rev.* 4, no. 2 (1981): 257-81 (<http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/iclr/vol4/iss2/2>)

#### Web

Kwame Ture on Organization  
<https://youtu.be/B6L7rwsCwbs>

Obama in Africa: Secret Bases and Drone Warfare  
<http://roape.net/2016/12/15/obama-africa-secret-bases-drone-warfare/>

Roman Law and Its Influence in America  
<https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4429&context=ndlr>

The right to vote is not in the Constitution  
<https://theconversation.com/the-right-to-vote-is-not-in-the-constitution-144531>