

# viewpoint

## OPINIONS PAGE BLOG

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## Property taxes deserve a look on pension debt



**ron littlepage**  
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Here are some of the concerns about Mayor Lenny Curry's proposed sales tax that will be on the Aug. 30 ballot. Chief among them is the fact that a sales tax is regressive. Studies have shown that Florida, which relies heavily on sales taxes for revenue, already has the second highest tax burden on the poor.

Those on the bottom one-fifth of the economic ladder in Florida pay 13 percent of their income in state and local taxes while the top 1 percent pay 2 percent.

The argument is often made that a sales tax isn't so bad because food and medicines are exempt.

News flash: Poor people need other things that are subject to sales taxes.

Curry promotes the sales tax as the best way to make sure everyone helps pay

off the pension debt that is dogging the city's finances.

While it is attractive to have tourists visiting our city help us out of a mess we created, not everyone pays sales taxes.

Among the largest groups exempt are religious institutions and 501(c)(3) nonprofits, all of which rely on city services but don't help foot the bill.

That also applies to another main source of the city's revenue: property taxes.

A look at a list provided by the Property Appraiser's Office of property owners exempt from paying ad valorem taxes in Duval County is eye-opening.

There are 17,434 exempt properties with a total assessed value of \$8.6 billion.

Properties owned by the city, state and federal governments account for many of them.

Another large group is church-owned property. In that category, there are 1,266 properties with an average assessed value

of \$899,979 and a total assessed value of \$1.1 billion.

Properties owned by nonprofits, union halls and private schools are among numerous other groups exempt from paying property taxes.

While there may be good reasons for the exemptions, these properties require city services but aren't adding to the city's coffers.

Curry says that his sales tax proposal is the only workable solution.

He rules out any millage rate increase with one of his arguments being that a future City Council could reduce the millage rate and not pay down the debt.

The city, however, enters into agreements all the time that bind future councils on how they spend money with a prime example being the millions of dollars in corporate welfare the city owes.

That brings us to the recommendations of the Pension Reform Task Force.

**One was to set aside \$200 million a year**

**to cover the city's annual contribution to the Police and Fire Pension Fund and to accelerate paying down the fund's debt, the biggest nut to crack at \$1.7 billion.**

**That could be accomplished with a one mill increase. The city's contribution to the fund this year was \$153 million. A mill produces \$47.6 million now and should increase with rising property values.**

**The task force said that with reforms to police and fire pension plans, most of which have already been done, and the \$200 million annual payment, the fund could be 80 percent funded by 2028.**

Curry's sales tax wouldn't even start being collected until 2030 and could last until 2060.

With either a sales tax or property tax, many would still escape paying, but which is better: Start paying off the debt now or shove it off to a future generation that didn't incur it?

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## 'White privilege' is a total myth in today's America



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"Something startling is happening to middle-aged white Americans. Unlike every other age group, unlike every other racial and ethnic group ... death rates in this group have been rising, not falling."

So wrote Gina Kolata in The New York Times of a stunning study by the husband-wife team of Nobel laureate Angus Deaton and Anne Case.

But what explains the social disaster of white Middle America?

### A LOST GENERATION

First, an economy where, though at or near full employment, a huge slice of the labor force has dropped out.

Second, the real wages of working Americans have been nearly stagnant for decades.

Two major contributors to the economic decline of the white working-class: Scores of millions of third-world immigrants, here legally and illegally, who depress U.S. wages, and tens of thousands of factories and millions of jobs shipped abroad under the label of "globalization."

Another factor in the crisis of middle and working class white men is the plunging percentage of those who are married. Single white men are not only being left behind by the new economy, they are becoming alienated from society. We all have seen the figure of 72 percent of black children being born out of wedlock. For working class whites, it is up to 40 percent. A lost generation is growing up all around us.

In the popular culture of the 1940s and 1950s, white men were role models.

They were the detectives and cops who ran down gangsters and the heroes who won World War II. They were doctors, journalists, lawyers, architects and clergy. White males were our skilled workers and craftsmen. They were the Founding Fathers and the statesmen. Lincoln and every president had been a white male. Middle-class white males were the great inventors. They were the great capitalists. And the great captains of America's wars were white males.

### WHITE AMERICA UNDER SIEGE

What has changed in our culture? Everything.

The world has been turned upside-down for white children.

In our schools the history books have been rewritten and old heroes blotted out as their statues are taken down and their flags are put away.

Children are being taught that America was "discovered" by genocidal white racists, who murdered the native peoples of color, enslaved Africans to do the labor they refused to do, brutalized and colonized indigenous peoples all over the world.

In Hollywood, working-class white males are regularly portrayed as what was once disparaged as "white trash."

Republicans are instructed that demography is destiny, that white America is dying and that they must court Hispanics, Asians and blacks.

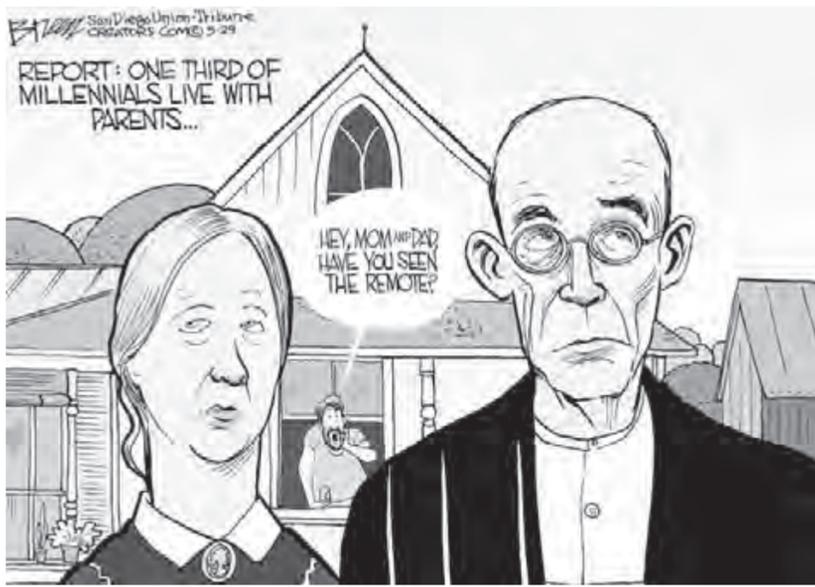
White males, now down to 31 percent of the population, have become the only Americans against whom it is not only permissible but commendable to discriminate.

"Angry white male" is now an acceptable slur in culture and politics.

So it is that people of that derided ethnicity, race and gender see in Donald Trump someone who unapologetically berates and mocks the elites who have dispossessed them — and who despise them.

Is it so surprising that Trump today, like Jess Willard a century ago, is seen by millions as "The Great White Hope"?

## Another View: Steve Breen San Diego Union-Tribune



## Another View: Andy Marlette Creators Syndicate



## Rubio should resist the call to seek Senate re-election



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A pack of relatively unknown Republicans.

Two Democratic candidates, one handpicked by the establishment with a slew of bad-news stories and the other a gadfly leftist.

It is that set of circumstances in Florida's U.S. Senate race that

has gotten Republicans revved up about the potential to hold a critical seat — so long as they can round up someone a cut above the current field.

CNN reported that "top Republicans are becoming nervous that they may lose Marco Rubio's Senate seat and their tenuous majority in the chamber — and now many want the Florida senator to reconsider his decision to leave office .. Rubio is declining, but the pressure is only bound to intensify ahead of the June 24 filing deadline."

### NO NEED TO RUN AGAIN

But Rubio gains nothing by running for Senate and serving another term. If Hillary Clinton is president, as seems likely, the GOP is back to being the party of no — the obstructionist party.

Unlike some Republicans, Rubio does not need the Senate. He has a well-established profile and sufficient experience in government. He can criticize both parties from afar once he is out of office.

However, it would be a mistake for Rubio not to use the time between now and 2020 (isn't the next presidential election what we are really talking about?) to round out his résumé and quiet some concerns about him personally.

*Marco Rubio doesn't need to be in the Senate to remain relevant.*

### HONE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Rubio could use some executive leadership, a big project in which he is not 1 out of 100 but rather the person in charge.

He's a man who knows a lot of things about a lot of things. But he should pick one or two — among human rights, poverty, education, health care — and show he can lead some kind of organization.

Mitt Romney ran the Olympics. Jeb Bush ran an education foundation. Rubio would be smart to find his own perch.

Moreover, Rubio got the reputation in the presidential race of being a nice guy but a little too soft and too eager to please.

Maybe in a setting outside the Senate, he can demonstrate tenacity, learn to listen to his inner voice instead of his aides' advice and develop a measure of toughness that one needs to survive a presidential race.

He also should do the things someone who wants to be president one day does: traveling and campaigning on issues, fundraising and speaking out on others of the day.

In the wake of Donald Trump, the GOP will have an identity crisis. Does it want to go nativist? Is it bent on trying the conservative purity game once more?

Rubio is one of a few figures with the ability to shape the discussion and the GOP's identity in a principled, relevant way.

Jennifer Rubin writes the Right Turn blog for The Washington Post.

## The ugly truths 'Roots' forced us all to confront



**leonard pitts jr.**  
mclatchy newspapers

Everything was different, the day after.

If you are a child of the millennium, it may be difficult for you to get this.

You might find it hard to appreciate how it was when

there were only three networks and no DVR nor even VCR, so that one major TV program sometimes became a communal event. So it was on a Sunday night, the 23rd of January, in 1977.

I was a senior at the University of Southern California, working part time at the campus bookstore. When I went to work the next day, you could feel that something had shifted.

Your black friends simmered.

Your white friends tiptoed past you. We had all watched the first episode of "Roots," had all seen the Mandinka boy Kunta Kinte grow to the cusp of manhood, had all borne witness as he was chained like an animal and stolen away from everything he had ever known. Now we no longer knew how to talk to one another.

### CONFRONTING OUR PAST

I had a friend, a white guy named Dave Weitzel. Ordinarily, we spent much of our shift goofing on each other the way you do when you're 19 or so. But on that day after, the space between us was filled with an awkward silence.

Finally, Dave approached me. "I'm sorry," he said, simply. "I didn't know."

It is highly unlikely the new version of "Roots," airing this week on the A&E television networks, will be the phenomenon the original was.

There are more than three networks now and with the exception of the Super Bowl, we no longer have communal television events.

But the new show will be a success if it simply kindles in us the courage to confront and confess the history that has made us.

I didn't know much about that in 1977. Sixteen years of education had taught me all about the Smoot-Hawley tariff but next to nothing about how a boy could be kidnapped, chained in the fetid hold of a ship and delivered to a far shore as property.

As a result, I had only a vague sense of bad things having happened to black people in the terrible long ago.

I was as ignorant as Dave. Small wonder.

### SHATTERING OUR MYTHS

The history "Roots" represents embarrasses our national mythology. As a result, it has never been taught with any consistency. Even when we ostensibly spotlight black history in February, we concentrate on the achievements of black strivers — never the American hell they strove against.

So you hear all about the dozens of uses George Washington Carver found for a peanut but nothing about Mary Turner's newborn stomped to death by a white man in a lynch mob.

We don't know what to do with those stories, so we ignore them — hoping that time, like a tide, will bear them away. But invariably, they wash up instead in mass incarceration, mass discrimination and the souls of kids who know their lives are shaped by bad things from long ago, even if they can't always say how.

Almost 40 years later, I'm embarrassed by the righteous vindication I got from Dave's apology.

Dave Weitzel, the individual man, had not done anything to me.

But like me, he had never been given the tools to face the ugly truths America hides from itself, had never been taught how to have the conversation.

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