

Representative Burgess Owens

Remarks Before the House Administration Committee

Wednesday, July 28, 2021

“Election Subversion: A Growing Threat to Electoral Integrity”

Thank you Chairperson Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the committee for the invitation to join you today at this hearing.

In April, I was invited to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee’s hearing titled “Jim Crow 2021: The Latest Assault on the Right to Vote.” The testimony I’ll share with you this afternoon is similar to that I shared with the Senate Judiciary Committee in April. My main point is the same: whether you classify states’ new election laws as “Jim Crow 2021” or as a “subversion” of a people’s right to vote, your argument is flawed and offensive. As I’ll explain, I experienced actual Jim Crow laws. The right to vote for many members of my community and family was actually subverted. Various state requirements that require voters to show an i.d. and actually expand voter access are simply not comparable to the “Jim Crow experience.”

My American story begins with my Great-Great-Grandfather, Silas Burgess, who arrived in America as a child shackled in the belly of a slave ship. Silas was sold on an auction block with his mother in Charleston, South Carolina, to the Burgess Plantation. He escaped through the Underground Railroad and later became a successful entrepreneur, purchasing a 102-acre of farmland paid off in two years.

My grandfather, Oscar Kirby, served our country in WWI and was a respected and successful farmer raising 12 children all of whom graduated from college.

My father, Clarence Burgess Owens, Sr., was stationed in the Phillipines at the end of WWII. When he returned home to Texas, actual Jim Crow laws denied him a post-graduate education. Raised in a generation that used this as motivation, he received his PhD in agronomy at Ohio State University and had a successful career as a professor, researcher, and entrepreneur.

I grew up in the Deep South—in Tallahassee, Florida—in the 1960s, during the days of the KKK, Jim Crow, and segregation—an era of actual institutional racism. My first experience with white Americans was at 16 years old.

At 18, I was the third black athlete to receive a scholarship to play football at the University of Miami. Now, I proudly represent Utah's Fourth Congressional District in the United States Congress.

I sit before you today as someone who has lived the American dream, as have millions of Americans of all races from every background. This is due to our country's mission statement that "all men [and women] are created equal," A mission statement that every American should have equal opportunities for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

As someone who actually experienced Jim Crow laws, I'd like to set the record straight on the myths regarding the recently-passed Georgia state law—and why calling this "election subversion" is *absolutely* outrageous.

Here are a few examples from my own life of what Jim Crow laws actually looked like.

- At the age of 12, my father allowed me to participate in a demonstration with college students in front of the segregated Florida State Theatre, where because of our color, we could not

enter. I was the youngest participant there. Only 50 years later did I learn that my father had parked across the street to watch and make sure I was safe.

- In the 7th grade my school never received new books. Instead, we received used books from the all-white school across town.
- At service stations, there were *white men only* restrooms, *white women only* restrooms, and one filthy *restroom* in the back of the station for Black Americans designated as Colored.

In addition, Jim Crow laws like poll taxes, property tests, literacy tests, and violence and intimidation at the polls, made it nearly impossible for Black Americans to vote.

The section of the Georgia law that has brought so much outrage from the Left *SIMPLY* requires any person applying for an absentee ballot to include *evidence* of a government issued ID on their application. If a voter does not have a driver's license or id card, that voter can use a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows the name and address of this voter.

- If a voter somehow can't produce one of the above forms of id, that voter may still cast a provisional ballot.

By the way, 97% of Georgia voters already have a government issued ID.

What I find offensive is the narrative from the Left that black people are not smart enough, not educated enough, and not desirous enough for independence to do what every other culture and race does in this country – get an ID.

True racism is *this* ... the soft bigotry of low expectations.

President Biden said of the Georgia law “This is Jim Crow on steroids.” With all due respect, Mr. President, you know better.

It is disgusting and offensive to compare the actual voter suppression and violence of the era that we grew up in with a state law that *ONLY* asks people to show their id.

This is the type of fear-mongering I expected in the 1960s, not today.