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“Money, Wealth, and Freedom”

Baba Lumumba of Umoja House in Washington, DC recently crystalized beautifully an important reason for the absence of Black American unity and, consequently, for our snail’s pace progress on the “freedom” front—however we define it. He suggests that there are two Black American camps: Integrationists/assimilationist (IAs) and separatists/nationalists (SNs). However, we are compelled to add that there are always fence sitters.

This recognition brings with it important inferences. The two camps represent different perspectives about the importance of money and wealth—at a minimum, the timing of access to money and wealth. This is natural because IAs prefer life in a Eurocentric society that is grounded in materialism and that is largely accessed using money and wealth. It is transparent that IAs desire money and wealth and the related benefits now, and have determined that the best strategy for satisfying that desire is to continue what is labeled “integration” or assimilation efforts that followed the Civil Rights Movement.ⁱ

On the other hand, SNs may desire benefits associated with money and wealth, but they express a willingness to obtain money and wealth on their own, independent terms. SNs posit that the sweetness of money and wealth will be best enjoyed in an environment that is some (physical) distance from our long-standing oppressors, and they are willing to pursue vigorously money and wealth only after establishing that distance. They realize that during the effort to create that distance, there may be limited access to money and wealth.

An important set of questions is: (1) Do IAs and SNs consider their paths to their chosen/preferred ways of life to be paths to freedom? (2) Which path (IAs or SNs) offers the greatest opportunity to experience freedom? Answers to these questions are likely to hinge tightly on how freedom is defined.

For purposes of this essay, we offer the following definition of freedom: “The ability to do what one wants, when one wants, the way one wants.” It carries implications for the two aforementioned environments and for money and wealth.

Considering the two environments, at least initially and until they are fully enmeshed in Eurocentric ways of life, Black IAs are likely to find their freedom constrained because, by definition, the Afrikan-centered society from whence they came differs from the Eurocentric society that they enter. Certain IAs “wants” are unacceptable in Eurocentric societies. Conversely, Black SNs operating in an Afrikan-centered society may consider themselves quite free because,

by definition, their “wants” are consistent with what is acceptable in the separate Afrikan-centered society of which they have always been a part.

As for money and wealth, recalling the definition of “freedom” and the nature of the chosen environment, IAs are likely to find themselves much less free. Why? Because their chosen Eurocentric society presents a “nasty, brutish, and short life” that is only softened in its harshness by payments in money and wealth. The high demand for the softening of cold and cruel conditions drives up the price of things desired/wanted, meaning that more money is required to meet one’s desires. This translates into a need for a higher level of attention on acquiring money and wealth than on enjoying the benefits made possible by money and wealth. Moreover, the incessant requirement for money and wealth also means that IAs must expend more time and energy on efforts to manipulate or leverage the money and wealth that they acquire to ensure that it expands sufficiently to purchase what is required to meet their desires. This process, too, reduces one’s ability to do what one wants, when one wants, the way one wants. That is, freedom can be constrained considerably because IAs’ preferred physical environments and the related culture combine to compound the restrictions on IAs’ freedom.

Arguably on its face, it seems safe to say that conditions confronted by SNs enable a higher level of freedom than is apparent for IAs. Greater freedom for SNs over IAs with respect to their chosen environments is noted above. The assumption is that SNs’ African-centered culture is less preoccupied with materialism and features more shared and communal approaches to life, which should reduce requirements to pursue money and wealth, thus expanding opportunities to enjoy freedom.

This analysis identifies SNs as having more opportunities than IAs to enjoy freedom. To our knowledge, there is no widely recognized data collection effort that informs us about how Black Americans are split on this issue: IAs versus SNs. Also, there is no easy method for using existing data to perform complete and perfect assignments of Black Americans to IAs versus SNs camps. Hence, we ask: What is the “value added” of this essay?

We believe that the value of this essay is that it: (1) Provides one logical framework for considering the “Black American Two Camp Issue;” (2) Clearly links persons in the two camps to their differing inherent values for money and wealth—at least temporally; and (3) Confirms the veracity of the old adage that “it may be freeing to hold a modicum of money and wealth, but a large volume of money and wealth will come to own/control the holder, which may serve to limit, even reduce, freedom.” We believe that these three statements represent truth.

It is said that truth is not relative, but ubiquitous. Therefore in the spirit of the ubiquitousness of truth, we conclude this essay with the following statements: (1) It is possible to make sound decisions if high-quality information is available—with the highest quality information being without deviation from truth; (2) Our world is a morass of efforts to persuade us to take many actions and to pursue many paths; (3) One path and action set is to continue in concerted efforts to obtain money and wealth to acquire goods and services; (4) Often we are not extended true information about the nature and implications of our efforts to obtain money and wealth, nor about the costs and benefits of the goods and services obtained with our money and wealth; (5) without such true information we are likely to engage in unfavorable efforts to obtain money and wealth

and to consume goods and services that are unfavorable; (6) Our pursuit of money and wealth and our consumption of goods and services can limit or reduce our freedom; and (7) limits to, or reductions in, our freedom are compounded when our decisions concerning how to pursue money and wealth and which goods and services to consume are not based on the highest quality (truthful) information.

The well-known moral of this essay is: Money and wealth alone cannot produce freedom; freedom comes from the exercise of truth; and truth is a form of knowledge. The inference is that acquisition of truthful information can enable favorable decisions that augment, but not limit or reduce, our freedom. As suspected, truth is an import key for accessing freedom.

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Endnote

ⁱ BlackEconomics.org questions the use of the term “integration” because the mixing of two unequal substances typically results in a superimposition of the will of the larger over the smaller, which is not what Black Americans wanted, imagined, or were told to expect when the effort commenced.