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“Revisiting Black American Leadership”

Why is Black America at the US’s socioeconomic bottom? There is little disagreement that we are where we are because we are not unified and not organized well enough to, *inter alia*, use the following standard strategic planning model to achieve persistent success:

1. Establish and ensure that we all know our short- and long-term objectives and goals.
2. Survey *status quo* conditions and assess/identify obstacles blocking access to our objectives and goals.
3. Develop strategic plans for: (i) Obtaining the wherewithal to remove the obstacles; (ii) undertaking removal of the obstacles; (iii) alternative tactics should the just-mentioned plans fail; (iv) fully achieving the objectives and goals that lie beyond the obstacles; and (v) assessing the effectiveness of the just described planning and implementation efforts to identify and incorporate improvements into future plans.
4. Implement the plans highlighted in part 3.
5. Repeat steps 1 through 4 *ad infinitum*.

Why are we not more unified and well organized? Because our “leadership” is distant from the people, disunited, and fragmented in their vision for us. When our opposers tricked Black leadership into accepting a “racial integration” paradigm during the 1960s, Black leadership was

permitted to escape our areas of influence; they often landed at suburban destinations. Given their and non-leader Black Americans’ mentalities at the time, it was common to hear the boast: “You know, we’re the only ‘darkies’ out there.”ⁱ But that separation imposed two devastating adverse outcomes on Black America: (1) It caused some “leaders” to lose close touch with their people; (2) it caused almost all Black leaders to conclude that “education” was the key to success for all of us (because they considered education to be their key), and they drove that point home at every opportunity and in every venue when and where they engaged with us.

Although not among “leadership,” we, too, imbibed this notion and emphasized the need for STEMAIR (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Artificial Intelligence, and Robotization) knowledge too aggressively as “the” key to Black America’s success. It is safe to say that, up until recently, education was viewed as a panacea for “the Black American problem.”

Ironically, deeper analysis of this “education is sufficient” strategy will reveal that it is an important contributing cause of Black America’s current predicament. In one sense, it may be unfair to beat down brutally on Black leaders concerning this issue. They concluded that education was of overriding importance because they refused to look reality in the face and recognize that we did

and do not live in an ideal world. In an ideal world with no discrimination and a small population, educational excellence alone could have pushed us toward the top (economically and otherwise).ⁱⁱ However, today's reality shows what happens under non-ideal conditions.

We find Black Americans spending too much of our lifetimes pursuing degrees (for a variety of reasons—not all academic). Some Black Americans barely meet standards for degrees (sometimes admitting: “my soul looks back and wonders how I got over”), which places them at the bottom tier of degree holders—a condition that often follows them throughout their careers. Too often, we capture degrees in fields that are not very useful for aiding Black America's rise. We accumulate heavy debt burdens that prevent investment and wealth building. We create family problems due to insufficient time to devote to family matters. We create dissimulation among family, friends, and community because of false perceptions on both sides concerning the comparative self or human worth of those with and without degrees. And so on.

Nearly 25 years ago, we produced an essay entitled, “Expectations are Everything.”ⁱⁱⁱ It reflects certain truths. Related to that essay, a very important truth is that we reside in a racist America where our opposers take every opportunity to diminish Black Americans. Therefore, it is essential that we counteract that hate by continuously reinforcing within the minds of our youth that they can be the absolute best. But we do not need all Black American youth to obtain education that qualifies them for jobs using microphones to perform as attorneys in court, as politicians, as government officials, as college or university professors, as media personalities, as teachers in schools, as coaches, or as ministers before congregations. There are so

many other vital functions in our society that must be fulfilled and that are worthy of consideration and selection as occupations. An unsettling truth is that overreachers often fail to optimize their potential.

Therefore, Black leaders' failure to comprehend the foregoing and to, instead, promulgate a one-dimension solution (education) for the Black American problem is an important contributing cause for many of our ills. Please be clear that this analysis concerns post-secondary education. Pre-K, elementary, and secondary education are totally different conundrums. At the same time, it should be clear that our failure to focus in laser-like fashion on our youth's Pre-K, elementary, and secondary education contributes to their failings at the post-secondary level that were discussed already.

So, what should have been our leadership's message(s)? We cannot say comprehensively or definitively. But we offer an elementary fact and then we consider Hispanic/Latino Americans as an example of a People who either had sound leadership or who were blessed tremendously to implement an excellent plan for their success in the US over the past 60 years.

The elementary fact is that to survive anywhere on Earth, there are three requirements: (1) Food and water; (2) clothing; and (3) shelter. In today's context, we add energy to that list. Therefore, it is logical that as leadership for a People, even if there is a deep interest in increasing educational attainment, significant emphasis should remain on retaining strong footholds in the production of the just-listed four life requirements. Black American leadership was tricked into emphasizing education to a fault. We now find ourselves with limited involvement in the production of these requirements. This is unbelievable when we

realize that, 60 years ago, we were the “heart and soul” of industries that produced these requirements. It seems that we were misled to spend too much time fighting for Affirmative Action (today’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) to gain unavailable opportunities

and not enough time fighting to protect existing opportunities. The latter opportunities subsequently slipped from our grasp.

Only three parts remain to this essay. The first is Table 1.

Table 1.—Black Versus Hispanic/Latino Employment in Selected Life Requirement Industries

| Line No. | Industries | (A) Black Employees | | (B) Hispanic/Latino Employees | | Differences (B – A) | |
|----------|---|------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
| | | Number* | Percent | Number* | Percent | Number* | Percent |
| | | 1 | Crop production | 32 | 2.6 | 364 | 30.0 |
| 2 | Animal production and aquaculture | 23 | 3.1 | 149 | 20.5 | 126 | 17.4 |
| 3 | Support activities for agriculture and forestry | 9 | 6.5 | 35 | 24.3 | 26 | 17.8 |
| 4 | Oil and gas extraction | 3 | 4.7 | 22 | 29.5 | 19 | 24.8 |
| 5 | Construction | 782 | 6.5 | 4,221 | 35.1 | 3,439 | 28.6 |
| 6 | Food Manufacturing | 268 | 15.7 | 517 | 30.3 | 249 | 14.6 |
| 7 | Textiles, apparel, and leather manufacturing | 62 | 14.5 | 134 | 31.2 | 72 | 16.7 |

Source: Endnote iv provides a citation for the data source.^{iv} *—In thousands. BlackEconomics.org visualization.

Table 1 provides data for 2024 and reveals that Hispanic/Latino Americans have worked to colonize their positions within seven important life requirement-related industries; they represent on average nearly 30 percent of the workers in these seven industries. The percent differences between Hispanic/Latino versus Black American employees in these industries, as stated earlier, are unbelievable given the 1960s status of Black American employment in these industries. It is common knowledge that many Blacks discontinued working, or turned away from opportunities to work, in these industries to pursue post-secondary education.

Beyond questioning Black leadership’s failure, a crucial question implicit in this essay is: Due to increased educational attainment, is Black American wellbeing elevated today over our wellbeing during the 1960s when Hispanic/Latino Americans began replacing Black Americans as workers in life requirement industries in a big way? A comprehensive analysis of this question is

beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is common knowledge that: The Black unemployment rate is higher than the Hispanic/Latino unemployment rate and is generally twice the rate for the nation; and on average, Hispanics/Latinos have higher household incomes and wealth than Blacks. Importantly, Hispanic/Latino Americans have “peace of mind” knowing that their group is better positioned than Black Americans in important life requirement industries should crises arise.

Second, we ask which of the two groups (Black or Hispanic/Latino Americans) is best positioned to experience a significant surge in income and wealth over the next few years in response to US natural disaster events that occurred in just the last year? The over 4.2 million Hispanic/Latino construction industry employees are likely to benefit greatly from increased construction demand and to see elevated incomes, which they can parlay into wealth. Presumably, because they practice “group economics,” the entire group

may benefit substantially from this surge in construction demand. Accordingly, we should anticipate a widening of the Black-Hispanic/Latino income and wealth gaps in the near term.

Third, this essay revisits Black American leadership.^v Since the 1960s, Black leadership failed to develop and implement a sound Black American strategic plan. This leadership failure caused Black America to lose gold (our “heart and soul” roles in key life requirement industries) while chasing diamonds (academic degrees); the latter can prove to be a problematic asset. Arguably, Black American leadership failure is compounded because, had Black Americans remained a strong presence in life requirement industries, it is likely that we would have created Black businesses in these industries and increased our employment, self-sufficiency, income, and wealth.^{vi}

But failure can be a steppingstone to greater strength and future success if sufficient time remains in that future. To achieve such success, we turn to our nearly two-year-long tried and true prescription: A prescription offered up by the grassroots. We urge Black leaders to awaken and operationalize the following action: (1) See the truth of this essay; (2) beat the addiction and then trade in C-Suite jobs associated with Black American oppression in exchange for roles in fashioning and implementing a new strategic action plan. On the other hand, Black American leadership can consider using existing Black American development plans (we suggest the *Long-Term Strategic Plan for Black America*) to reverse the failure and place Black America on a steady course to untold success.^{vii} We can only hope that it is not too late for Black American leaders to help us fulfill our faithful claim: “And Yet We Rise!”

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02/28/25
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Endnotes

ⁱ This is a paraphrase of Malcolm X’s (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz’s) often used language.

ⁱⁱ This would be consistent with the American Jewish model. Black Americans have often considered Jews as an antecedent group that overcame discrimination through academic achievement. However, there are many factors that render the Jewish model inappropriate for Black Americans’ use.

ⁱⁱⁱ B. B. Robinson (2001). “Expectations Are Everything.” National Center for Public Policy Research; <https://nationalcenter.org/ncppr/2001/09/01/expectations-are-everything-by-dr-b-b-robinson/> (Ret. 022825).

^{iv} US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025). “Table 18. Employed persons by detailed industry, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.” *Current Population Survey*. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat18.htm> (Ret. 022125).

^v Our first submission on Black American leadership was: Brooks Robinson (2021) “A Historical Critique of Black American Leadership.” BlackEconomics.org; <https://www.blackeconomics.org/BELit/leadership.pdf> (Ret. 022825).

^{vi} It is logical that, over the past 60 years, if Black leadership continuously anticipated large increases in educated Black Americans working for non-Black firms or government (which was and is consistent with many Black leaders’ life roles), then they would have not comprehended the need to emphasize entrepreneurship and group economics, which are huge challenges for Black America today.

^{vii} Long-Term Strategic Plan Panel (2023). *Long-Term Strategic Plan for Black America*. Long-Term Strategic Plan Panel; https://www.ltspfba.org/LTSP/fin_ltspfba_071223.pdf (Ret. 022125).